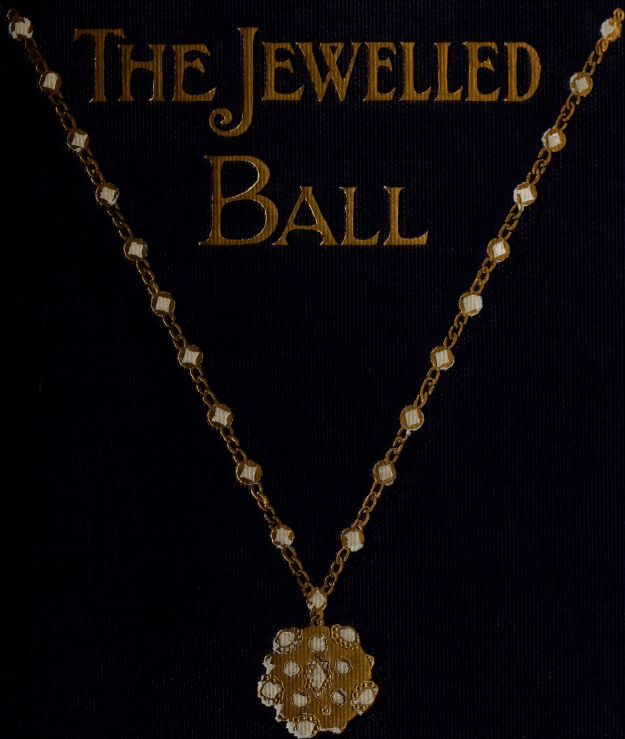


THE JEWELLED BALL



Flora Bigelow Guest

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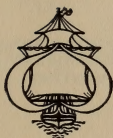
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THE JEWELLED BALL

The Jewelled Ball

FLORA BIGELOW GUEST



MONTREAL
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BY FLORA BIGELOW GUEST,
MONTREAL

PART I

THE TOSS

The Jewelled Ball

CHAPTER I.

“**H**ELLO, Grantley—come over and join us for tea.”

The most popular corner of White's Club was taken by a group of three or four scions of fashion, and all simultaneously motioned a welcome to the young Duke as the speaker drew his attention. Herbert Montagu Ellsmere, 4th Duke of Grantley, was still in mourning for his father, who had died less than a year after the decease of his Duchess. Theirs had been an ideal marriage for over twenty-two years, and in their only child were developed the characteristics which had been conspicuous in both the parents. The late Duke's moral courage, sense of justice, and democratic Christianity made him prominent among his fellows. The Duchess shewed the deep and tender feelings she felt for those near and dear to her, without being ashamed

of them as many English women are trained to be, and in her simple, well-bred life had fostered all her son's ideals until he was of the age to risk their being shattered, when, with marvellous skill and tenderness, she taught him to be merciful and generous in his judgments.

Whether due to inheritance or training Bertie Grantley was the most popular of all respected young men in England, and the most respected of any "parti." He was not a ladies' man—his mother had been his constant companion—and neither his tastes nor inclinations ever drew him toward lighter relations with women. For his age he was a thorough man of the world, a good sportsman and intelligent about current topics. A high sense of responsibility and keen appreciation of the ridiculous kept him from the fault of taking himself too seriously, the root from which all bores spring. The young Duke of Grantley had been nurtured amidst everything that would tend to spoil him, but was totally unspoiled, modest and grateful for all the kindness

showered on him, whether from interested or disinterested motives. He had a few intimate friends among a certain set of young men in London who, having interests in common, grouped themselves together, and Grantley was usually the central figure.

Above the average height, and slightly stooped, he was of strong and supple build. His features were long and his grey eyes stern and rather sad when in repose.

"I hear Neil Everett has won his election," continued the speaker.

"How pleased Lady Frost will be!" replied Grantley, pouring out his tea, which the waiter had just set down beside him.

"Isn't Bertie a wonder?" said Hamilton Fitzmaurice, as he looked contemplatively at his empty glass in an effort to determine the advisability of still another whiskey and soda. "If he possibly can he always says the pleasant thing. Now, when I was told Neil had won his election, I almost fainted, and

said to his first cousin that I could not understand how such a man, with black-balls staring him in the face at nearly every club in London, could by any possible means get into the House of Commons—you will allow the remark was an unfortunate one to make to a female relative. Why did I not have tact enough to say ‘How pleased his mother must be?’”

General laughter greeted this confession.

‘Well, she will be, won’t she?’ answered Grantley. “And she deserves a reward for the work she has done. She and Mrs. Van Ebens practically won the election for him.”

Hamilton Fitzmaurice adjusted his tie thoughtfully for a moment while he drew inspiration for his next remark.

“I am only a poor but honest Irishman, and I disapprove of gossiping like an old maid, but there seems some taint away down deep in my blood that makes me like it, and I simply love abusing people I don’t like—in fact, I give more thought to the people I don’t like than to

the people I do. Now, how do you account for that?"

Nobody seemed inclined or able to answer his question.

"Anyway, his victory was not a very glorious one, as it was largely due to distinctly false statements. It seems he swore he had no shares in the Eagle Potteries, while he was really a large holder."

"That is important, if true," said Grantley, "but let us give him the benefit of the doubt."

"We would, Bertie, but there is no doubt. The books shew it, and I was, and am still, a director. I am not running for Parliament, or how I should love to make it hot for him. He is the most insufferable cad I have ever known."

Hamilton Fitzmaurice delighted in this last bit of information and was preparing it already, with embellishments, for the dinner party he was going to that evening.

"By the way," said he, "what was the news you told me just as we were coming

in ? I wanted to ask Bertie if it is true."

"About Van Ebens being on the point of death?" answered the man addressed. "His condition is very critical. Of course Neil will marry Mrs. Van Ebens."

"I am sorry to say it is true," said Grantley. "Van Ebens is an exceptionally nice fellow, and one of nature's gentlemen, generous and kind and an upright business man. He will be a real loss to his friends."

"Who were his friends?" asked Hamilton. "Poor wretch! those who came to call on his wife? Neil will wear a crepe overcoat probably."

Fitzmaurice laughed so heartily at his own joke that the others, in spite of themselves, joined in.

"I am ashamed of you," said Grantley, wiping his eyes, "and more of myself for laughing with you. There is something so pathetic about having to make all new friends when one is over forty, however great bores our old ones may be. It is rather a comfort to feel one has known

them always.” He looked mischievously at Hamilton, and set that volatile young person off into more fits of laughter.

“Don’t mind me! Go on, Bertie; but fancy how much pathos there is in London society. Really, one could cry just talking about it. In fact, I control my tears with difficulty and call your attention to that enterprising Mr. Isaac Lowenstein—who lived twenty years in London, and last spring brought out a daughter in Mayfair who surely had made her *début* ten years earlier in Soho. This blushing creature at twenty-eight made her bow recently at a wonderful ball. Royalty scrambled for diamond and pearl German favors, and now—no one ever sees a shadow from Soho with the Lowensteins, without or within, male or female. I can understand making friends quickly, but I call it downright clever to lose them so quickly. The more common people are, the harder they are to lose.”

“You are an orator!” cried Grantley.
“A trifle cynical; but ——”

“Bah!” interrupted Hamilton Fitzmaurice. “You don’t see what I see, because you’re a duke. Mothers tripping over each other trying to get husbands for their daughters, any old reptile, provided he has money or a title, rather than a real jewel like myself.”

“Real jewel. Capital name for you, my boy!”

“I’m serious now. Think of me letting myself get fond of a woman, then having a scamp like Bertie walk off with her.”

There was something irresistibly funny about Hamilton Fitzmaurice, particularly when he didn’t mean to be. He was never taken seriously, and although everybody liked him and wanted him about, he was the sort of man no one ever seemed to allow should have preference, but was always expected to do what his friends wanted. If there was any woman no one wanted particularly to talk to, Hamilton was put next to her. His friends nicknamed him “Putty,” because he always filled up the cracks. He could make himself agreeable to any one,

and however outrageous his remarks were, no one ever resented them.

“To go back to that brilliant remark of mine about parvenus, have you ever thought what was the real test of a parvenu’s entertainment?”

“No, of course not! No one has ever thought of that but you, brilliant fellow!” chaffed Grantley.

“No joking now. Well, it is to have no frumps. If you find no frumps at a big ball, you may depend upon it that the family have recently learned to eat, etc. Most people have legacies of tiresome relatives or friends; common people have got to hide them, well-bred people needn’t be afraid of them. It is wonderful the *cachet* given by a few flat-chested women at a party, with odd hair and strange gowns. This shows that the hostess is an aristocrat and dares do what she pleases. This, my dear friends, is the end of my wisdom. I must see Lowenstein on business. What time is it? I want to be half an hour late, so as not to appear too eager.”

“Having spent two sleepless nights looking forward to this interview,” finished Grantley.

“I do believe, Grantley, you are sowing those wild oats of yours—a little late in the spring, but we are all prepared to benefit by the crop when it comes. But before you lose your reputation for dignity come with me, Bertie. Lend me an air of respectability to impress Lowenstein. He may be leaning out of the window looking for me as we stroll up arm in arm. Come, like a good chap. I am so nervous I am hardly able to walk alone.”

Grantley rose good-naturedly. The others settled themselves for cards.

Neil Everett came into the room at that moment. Several men glanced up at him, one or two bowed coldly. Grantley passed him in the doorway, nodded to him, but did not stop to congratulate him on his election. Neil felt the slight, not because they had a thought in common, but because he honestly felt respect for Grantley as a man, as well as because he was a duke,

and he always preferred intimacy with dukes. He felt they would never be friends, and yet he was the only man whose friendship Neil attached any value. Grantley shuddered as they passed out of the room.

“That man gives me the creeps! but I can’t help fancying he has his good points. If he fell in love and married some unworldly, high-minded woman, one might expect great things of him.”

“If every one were deaf, people might enjoy hearing me sing,” observed Hamilton Fitzmaurice, cheerfully.

CHAPTER II.

LADY FROST sat knitting for the poor in her luxurious drawing-room. Two footmen were clearing away the last of the tea things.

“William, Mr. Everett will be out to-night, and his lordship and I will dine at the usual hour in the small dining-room.”

“Very good, my lady,” answered the servant.

The knitting went on in silence for a few minutes, while her tall son paced restlessly up and down the room, into which he had come immediately on his return from the club, much depressed and dispirited. The wide hearth, cunningly devised of writhing monsters in iron and stone, was red with cheerful flames, whose brightness made one forget the heavy London fog without. The heavy velvet curtains and faded tapestries made of this room a noiseless sanctuary, where well-bred people might retire and success-

fully ignore the cold and wretchedness of another world. The air was delicious with the odor of many growing hyacinths and daffodils. Lady Frost was still a beautiful woman, of majestic proportions, and her son resembled her. Rippling over the laces about her neck hung a long diamond chain which fell below her knees. The stones though not large were matchless.

She had been silent all this time in sympathy with Neil's mood, which she saw was distinctly irritable, although she was eager to question him about his reception at the club after his election. Lady Frost was very ambitious and took a keen interest in the affairs of the nation, not for the good of the nation, but for the sake of her son, whom she had made her idol. By perseverance and entertaining, and getting the right people to work for him and her, she had at last landed him safely in the House of Commons. Now came to them both the sickening suspicion that nobody in the House of Commons of either party was in the least glad to have

him there. Both regarded him with distrust.

When Lady Frost spoke at last, she carefully chose a subject as remote as possible from the election.

"Have you heard, Neil, that Mr. Van Ebens is dangerously ill?"

Neil started. "Really? What a bore! another load on my conscience."

"You speak as though you had poisoned him." She looked at him with a half smile. It was delightful to think aloud as these two did together. They were each conscious of the fact at this moment.

"I mean, Mother, that I would rather hang myself than marry her, and I know that if Van Ebens departs this life and I don't marry her, every one will attack me, beginning probably with Mrs. Van Ebens herself. I was always careful to write nothing, but I know she believed me when I told her I would marry her if I ever had the chance. Women are such fools; they demand lies from a man before giving him more than a handshake."

"That would, of course, ruin your career, and is not to be thought of. She is not a suitable match for you in any way. There is an alternative."

"Yes, I was thinking of that too."

"Perhaps it is not the same one."

"My marrying some young girl at once? Love at first sight the excuse?"

"Yes, for you could hardly tell Muriel, Neil, that you were tired of her, for she would resent it."

"She might, but I could say you insisted upon my marrying. Now that I have just succeeded in winning my election, I do not wish to swamp my future by marrying a woman of no family, and five years my senior, however rich she may be. She would grow cross and ugly and jealous in a few years and want all her dreadful relations about her at Christmas time; you know the type. Well now, Mother, whom do you insist on my marrying?"

Lady Frost thought for a moment.

"Character is a great thing. You would never be led, and a determined girl

would quarrel or argue and become very troublesome. Of course I had always hoped you would grow fond of Vivien Nelson. She has desirable connections and would look well at the head of your table, and could be easily trained to fill a big position gracefully. When your father dies I shall be near you in the dower house to help you with her. I have the consolation of knowing that our married life has been an example to all our humbler acquaintances. Indeed, the Bishop of Ancaster was talking of it only a few days ago."

"You are an extraordinary woman. I swear I believe you wrote the only two speeches Father ever made in his life."

Lady Frost tried to droop her head with becoming modesty.

"Not quite, Neil, but I have helped, I believe. I think we come of an aggressive stock."

A feeble knock at the door brought Neil from his chair to open it for Lord Frost. He was over ninety, and not hale and hearty for his years,

“I have a letter I want you to read to me, my son. I think the postmark says it came from Naples, and I fancy it may be from my poor sister Ginnie.”

He moved toward his son, although Lady Frost stretched out her hand to him. Lord Frost's voice vibrated with emotion, for it was fifteen years since he had seen or heard from his sister, and he had many times regretted the scene that he and Lady Frost had had with her on the eve of her marriage to an Italian singing-teacher, driving her away in anger, with the man she loved, from the house that had been her home all her life. Lady Frost could not understand her sister-in-law, though she had tried to be kind to her for the two years she had had her under their roof. Lord Frost was devoted to the headstrong Ginnie, who, although many years younger, had easily ruled him until his marriage. Lady Frost had felt a sense of relief when Ginnie had gone and had slammed the door in her face, having declared it was good-bye for ever.

That night Ginnie ran away, and left a line to her brother saying she had gone to Naples to live in a garret on love and water, and to be cared for by Antonio Allerti. She left an address, but Lady Frost discouraged her husband from sending her an allowance or even words of affection. She was far from pleased at the letter which had just arrived. Neil, who always felt himself an observer of life, never a participator, was deeply interested in this new act of his life's drama. He read clearly:

“My dearest Brother,—

“I have one child. I do not wait to get any refusal from you, but send it to you to care for, as the white plague has taken me in its grip, and I am starting on a long journey, never to return.

GINNIE.”

The old man wiped his eyes. Lady Frost laid her jewelled fingers on his arm.

He buried his face in his hands—Lady Frost exchanged a glance with Neil—both were distinctly bored at the

news, and the thought that it might bring joy to the old man never crossed their minds. However, in a voice with which she might have ordered the removal of a beggar she said:

“Poor Georgina! her husband is probably dead too, so we must be kind to the boy, however inconvenient it all is.” To Lady Frost the only children that mattered were boys.

The footman at that moment threw open the door and announced, “Miss Allerti.”

A tall, overgrown child, with a shabby long black coat reaching to her heels, closely followed by a grey-headed peasant woman, to whose hand she held tightly, stood on the threshold. Lady Frost greeted her without the slightest sign of surprise and with cold ease of manner, while Neil looked at her in her travel-stained black, discerning the possibilities of splendid womanhood within two or three years.

Lord Frost put his arm tenderly about her and kissed her forehead. The hunt-

ed look suddenly left her face, and with a sudden, passionate impulse, she clung to him and sobbed:

“My mother always loved you—always.”

Her uncle kissed her over and over again, holding her at a little distance from him and trying to discover what likeness he could to his sister. Neil suggested that the attendant be shown to her quarters, but Ginnie refused to be left, and insisted upon going with her to share them. Lady Frost rang for the housekeeper, and when all three had left the drawing-room, gave a resigned sigh and took up her knitting-basket from the little table in the window. Her husband came and sat down beside her, having taken back the letter from Neil.

“You will be good to the girl for my sake, even though you never cared for Georgina. Draw out her heart and let her talk to you. She probably does not know anything about our—our troubles with her mother.”

“Of course, my dear, I will do my duty by her. It is all most inconvenient, but I suppose by her black that her mother died before she left, and the letter evidently was written on her death-bed. The maid will have full particulars; I shall question her.”

“Thank you.” Lord Frost rose and with some difficulty made his way to the door. Neil opened it for him, and then turned to his mother. For some moments he did not speak, and seemed strangely moved. Somehow he felt a vague presentiment that the girl who had just left the room had come to play a leading part in the comedy of his life. Presently he said:

“I will think about marrying Vivien Nelson for one year. I can’t decide yet. I shall take a trip, start to-morrow for India, Australia, or—”

“But, my dear boy, you have just been returned to Parliament. What has changed you so?”

“So I have. I clean forgot. Then send the girl to school.”

Their eyes met.

“I will send the girl to school then, instead,” she answered; and little Gin-nie was sent to school.

CHAPTER III

MRS. VAN EBENS stood looking out of her drawing-room window, searching with restless eyes each hansom that passed. She had found her months of widowhood very trying and lonely in her big house. It is true her relatives had come to see her, but, fond as she was of them, their interests were not in common, and during the last five years she had lived in a world they had never known. She found it an effort to talk to them, and began to long for the time when decency would permit of her seeing her more recent acquaintances. The first note she sent was to the Hon. Neil Everett, asking him to call to see her between two and five on Thursday afternoon. He had received the letter himself, and she knew it had reached him safely, yet now it was five minutes to five, and no message and no Neil. She had done

her best to suppress the thought that she might be one day asked to become the future Lady Frost, feeling it unwomanly to be so premature; but with true feminine tenderness, she was capable of nursing a thought after it had been morally dismissed. Muriel had made the late Van Ebens a proud husband, if not actually happy. When he had married a pretty bride, men who before had been most formal, addressed him by his first name, and said they knew him very well, although they invariably were callers at hours he spent at his office. Except that ham was never eaten in the house, the casual observer would not have recognized the different race to which he belonged. Van Ebens was kind and generous, and his wife was sincerely sorry he was dead. She had a few pangs for having fooled him, or thinking she had, and now, with strange incongruity, longed to see the man who had been the cause of all her regrets.

Suddenly she saw a hansom draw up

before her door and, with sharp disappointment, recognized Neil's voice telling the driver to wait. He evidently was not going to stay long. She heard his feet at last on the threshold, and turned to meet him with studied indifference. He bowed and kissed the tips of her slender fingers, and with the cursory glance of a voluptuary took in her beauty afresh. He had not seen her for over a month. Her yellow hair was piled in high curls on her head, and the long pale face was superbly poised above a faultless throat, which rose from amid the black crepe folds of her dress. The figure, though smaller than the average, was regal and imposing.

"I have not yet been able to congratulate you on your election," she began, motioning him to sit beside her on the sofa.

"Most of my success I owe to you, Muriel, for I believe you won it for me. Your efforts have been appreciated, even if clumsily acknowledged. Women manage men's success better than men can themselves."

Her smile was enchanting, and he resented feeling the charm he was determined to resist.

“I ran in to see how you were getting on. I have only a moment, not being master of my own time as much as I used to be. I must finish writing a speech before to-morrow. You will perhaps come to hear it.”

She was conscious of his uneasiness, but was clever enough to ignore it and talk of other things. Suddenly he said:

“Possibly you have not heard of the addition to our family; a niece, the result of an unfortunate Anglo-Italian love match, who arrived a few weeks ago, and now has been shipped off to school. It has been very upsetting, but still very interesting. My father insists upon having her at home week-ends, and is absolutely devoted to her. She reads to him and sings to him, and takes him out with her when he will allow no one else to do so. Aunt Ginnie’s child, she is hardly fifteen but looks twenty, and is as clever as she can be. She never speaks of her

father and mother, and her eyes always seem full of tears. It is rather a mystery whether it is local weakness or homesickness. She hates me so I hardly know her, but the whole thing amuses me very much. She sleeps with her servant and has the worst-tempered little mouth I ever saw, although she is, I believe, very religious. She will be good-looking one day, I hope, when she stops wearing Neapolitan mourning, but nobody dares suggest anything to her yet. I think I must take her in hand."

"You had better marry her."

"I shall never marry. I should only make a woman miserable." He got up and stood in front of the fire.

"Is that all that keeps you from it?" Her voice was full of meaning and he understood her thoughts.

"Yes. I am not rotten enough to escape my conscience or to be happy, and too selfish to change. '*Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse*'!"

"But your mother wants you to marry, surely?"

“Yes, Mother has picked out a bride for me. I should be mortified if she refused me and despise her if she accepted me, for she knows exactly what I am.”

“You are honest with yourself.”

“By moods I am honest, but never from principle.”

“Men are strange things. By the way, I hear you are devoted to Vivien Nelson?”

“Who is not that has met her? She has rare beauty.”

Mrs. Van Ebens rose and walked over to him. She looked very white in the firelight. Her honesty always made Neil a little uncomfortable.

“Forgive me for being unwomanly, and trust my generosity of heart, I beg you. I want you to tell me truthfully if you are thinking of marrying me or Vivien Nelson?”

What relief he felt at the way she placed the prospective answer! He turned his head a trifle to one side and looked with empty tenderness into her expectant face. The brute in him was strong but his cru-

elty was human. He preferred being kind if it cost him nothing.

“You value me far beyond my worth, dear.”

The answer was frank but not satisfying. Taking her two hands in his he went on:

“I am in love with no one but myself. My ambition has choked all else in me. I want a wife, and a son; but not yet—not yet. I shall never be as fond of another woman as I am of you, but I could not sacrifice anything for you without regret. I could not face my mother’s disapproval of my choice, or my friends’ ridicule for marrying a woman older than myself. I had not meant to speak to you so frankly, but you always have had the power to bring the best out of me.” He raised her fingers again to his lips with theatrical reverence.

“We will be friends?” she said, looking with questioning eyes hard into his. “Always friends, and only friends; and I will help you make your career and marriage.” She drew back from him. He

always made her head swim when too near.

"I don't believe in friendships between man and woman," he answered lightly. "Lovers and friends are all the products of circumstances."

"Then it is time you were taught better." She knelt down before the fire and held her frail palms up to the bright blaze; they were almost transparent. "Neil, you must never regret this talk. You have made a woman of me to-day."

He laughed nervously.

"I wish I could think you had made a man of me."

She did not answer what came into her mind to say. After all, why should she? She was a woman through and through. She had humiliated herself enough, and withdrawn her hopes and wishes with dignity. If he did not see what he was throwing away, she could not stoop to show it to him. With an effort her tone changed and became less serious. They talked of his election, of the Government blunders in South Africa, and before he

knew it his call had lasted an hour, and he left her in high good humor, thoroughly satisfied with himself.

When she was alone and the hall door was surely closed behind him, Mrs. Van Ebens ran up to her room, and for the first time since her husband's death, cried for him, and for her loneliness. Though her mourning began late it was genuine.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO years passed. Miss Vivien Nelson had reached twenty without an eldest son's proposal, and her mother was beginning to regret that she had forbidden George Walker the house, because, although he was impecunious and dull, he had an uncle with a big property in Scotland and a mild title, which one day he might fall heir to. Vivien, who at eighteen was the most innocent and lovely thing to be seen in a drawing-room, at twenty looked stupid and discontented. Even her fond mother saw the gradual change, and felt that Neil Everett had behaved very badly in taking her out twice into a conservatory the first season she came out, and then only dancing with her once at her own ball. Something must be done about it, for the anxious lady felt that possibly other eligibles were being kept away, fearing to compete with such a

catch, who openly professed to admire her beauty above all others. Mr. Everett had great wealth, one sure title, and the shadow of an earldom fluttering in the distance.

In society Vivien was tactful and yielding, with good manners and taste, and enough education not to mortify her family, but no more. No money had been spent on her beyond the merest necessities. She inherited enough discretion from her scheming mother to hide a dull and selfish nature. Thoroughly worldly, the guilelessness which she assumed as lightly as a becoming veil covered a hard heart and a shallow mind, only stimulated to activity by self-interest. At twenty her unkind thoughts were beginning to show through her pink and white doll's face, but she and her mother went to all the smart parties, and Vivien always felt herself the ornament, and rightly too. But there was nothing Neil had said or done which either of them could pin him to.

Mrs. Nelson thought of various plans

to bring the two young people closer together. Some of them succeeded, but the most important ones failed. She was gradually spending her capital on smart frocks for her daughter and houses for the London seasons, and at times grew very despondent about their common future. She knew that Lady Frost would like the match, for she had shown it very plainly; but Neil was hard to catch. Most mothers had come to that conclusion, but Neil himself could not be made to realize the importance of his marrying. So Mrs. Nelson decided that the only way left was to make him feel that he had compromised the girl, but how this was to be managed was another matter. After careful thought she planned her campaign and made her first move.

Lady Barr had a charming town house, especially designed for flirtations, with secluded corners and seductive divans, not to mention a garden at the back which was a real little Paradise. She was an artist and a Sybarite, but, alas her income was insufficient to indulge

her even in what she considered the necessities of life! She could not get into a bath before a pound of orris was dissolved in it, and her chiffon and laces might have strained longer purse-strings than Lord Barr's. Her country-place, an hour's journey from London, was the same sort of thing, very small, very perfect, very romantic. Many love-affairs had culminated under Lady Barr's roof, and after each desirable match, by some strange chance Lady Barr possessed herself of some new jewel or some treasure for her house. She had no enemies, was very pretty, and had enough admirers herself not to begrudge any woman hers. She was discreet. She never broke a confidence, and never gave her friends away, any more than she did herself. Lord Barr was seldom at home, and never in the way at any time.

Mrs. Nelson knew her slightly, but sought her out for an ally. After social greetings and a few formalities, the point of her visit was reached. She was quite frank about her wishes.

“Of course, I understand perfectly,” answered her hostess thoughtfully. “I would suggest at once a means of helping you, only I am frightfully handicapped just now by lack of funds. My husband has lost a lot in the stock market this winter, and I really feel like letting or closing my house this coming season, otherwise I should say, send the girl to me to chaperone for a couple of months while you go and travel for your health. Eldest sons are very wary of mothers these days, while an outside chaperone can do so much unobserved. The bother of it all is the money, and we can’t get away from that.”

She stroked the folds of velvet on her knee while her visitor digested her words. Mrs. Nelson leaned toward her:

“We live in a practical world, let us be practical. I will go and spend the spring abroad economically, and will give you six hundred pounds, just to take Vivien, for the extra expense it means to you. I will have a few months

in which to economize; giving up my carriage and servants will be a tremendous saving, and if the engagement is announced, I will gladly give you two thousand pounds."

"You are too generous, dear Mrs. Nelson." Lady Barr's tone implied she would have attempted the speculation for half that sum, and Mrs. Nelson felt she had perhaps, indeed, been too generous; but the words had been said, and she could not go back on them. Besides, Vivien cost her more than that every season, and if she were not married within the year they would both have to give up the world and retire to the continent, or her daughter must marry some social climber. The alternative was most depressing, and she felt a real thrill of gratitude at Lady Barr's answer.

"Very well, then, you leave it all to me and go away. Be sure you never breathe it to any one you ever promised me a penny; and would you mind writing on your card six hundred pounds

current expenses and two thousand capital invested? My memory is so bad, and it will enable me to see where I stand, and give her the full value of fun. Of course, I never have done anything like this before, but I should be glad to do something for your lovely daughter; and I am also devoted to Lady Frost, and to Mrs. Van Ebens oddly enough too. So you see I have plenty of tools to work with."

Mrs. Nelson drew her gold pencil from her card-case and wrote as requested, handing it across the tea-table as she rose to go.

"Then good-bye until next summer, and I shall expect Vivien and her maid on March 25th, two weeks from now. That will give us plenty of time to see our friends quietly, before the rush of the season begins."

They shook hands, and Mrs. Nelson heard Lady Frost announced as she turned to go.

CHAPTER V

IT often happens that the disappointments of some will work for the happiness of others. If Lady Frost resented the intruder's sex, she resented still more her husband's delight in Ginnie Allerti's companionship when she came home from school at the week-ends. Although occupying the nursery and not allowed at table with guests, she spent many hours with her helpless uncle. She read aloud beautifully to him, and sang her Italian songs to a guitar accompaniment in a manner which delighted him. He told her of the country she now must call her home, and interested her in its history and politics. He asked little about her parents and her own past, and only once spoke of her mother, to ask if she had been happy. A cloud of tragedy darkened little Ginnie's face, she trembled from head to foot, and looking about

as if in dread that some one might hear, whispered: "No, no! how could she?" Her uncle's natural reserve and shyness made him drop the subject there. He spoke of it later to his wife. Her curiosity was not great, and she had little sympathy for any of them, but she was always polite and considerate, and as long as her niece was not trying to entrap Neil, she was willing to do the best for her welfare. Ginnie was always eager to go to church, and so pleased her aunt, and the girl's intelligence and sincerity made her a welcome companion at times when Lady Frost had meetings and wanted her husband amused and looked after. Neil seldom saw her, and her dislike of him was almost comical, and a source of satisfaction to his mother; until she began to suspect that the new sensation Neil felt at being disliked and shunned rather appealed to him.

He stopped Ginnie in the hall one morning; he was just out of his room and she had been out for a walk. The

Neapolitan mourning had been exchanged for a smart London tailor's suit, and her shining grey-green eyes and glistening teeth gleamed through the half light of the London fog.

"I have not seen you for weeks, fair cousin," he said, stretching out his hand toward hers. She pretended not to see it and answered lightly:

"I sleep by night, and you sleep by day; and cats only hunt mice at night."

He caught her hand roughly. "You should not be rude to me in my home. You would be dependent on me were my father dead."

The words were unlucky. Tears sprang to her eyes, and she shuddered with horror.

"How can you be so—so cruel—and—" a lump came in her throat. This creature he was touching was real, human, emotional. He felt it was not the big house she would miss, but the feeble old man, in whom nobody had much interest any more, except for the money they could get. His health was

failing daily, and his intellect was no longer very clear. He lived the life of a recluse, and this girl, full of magnetic charm, really loved him, or was it all put on, he wondered. He would amuse himself and get to know her better and find out. Her words stung him, but her tone more so.

"Come in while I have breakfast. You have never seen me eat breakfast. You have plenty of time; this is Easter holidays!"

"But I can't help you or teach you to eat!"

"Do you only want to be with those you can help or teach?"

"I would rather be excused." She drew her hand away, and had almost passed him; he caught her arm again.

"Forgive me, Ginnie, but I want you very much. I need to talk to some one. I have some trouble you can help me with."

Her whole face lit up, full of sympathy and sweetness, and with the abandon of the South she took his hand, saying:

"I'm sorry, cousin Neil; I thought you were only teasing me, and I have a sharp tongue. But let me be of use to you; it would make me very happy."

They hurried into the dining-room, and she sat quietly watching him look into the various covered dishes with equal indifference. She poured his coffee, and he watched her with very mixed thoughts.

"Why do you hate me, Ginnie?"

She hung her head, and, evading his question, said:

"I thought you were in trouble."

"So I am; but why do you hate me?"

"I don't know, only it makes me feel creepy when you look at me."

He raised his head after the momentary shock her words gave him, and said gently:

"I quite understand." He showed his cleverness here, and she mistook it for sympathy. "Most women like the way I look at them. Perhaps when you are a society woman you will think me very attractive."

She laughed with contagious merri-ment. "O, I couldn't! I don't like your face or anything about you at all. I like black hair, and—O, I don't like your mouth or eyes; besides, you can't sing!"

"Can't sing! Thank God for that! Of all horrors commend me to a drawing-room Parliamentary singer!" He was enormously amused. Perhaps her operatic father remained her hero. "Do you like music very much?"

"Yes, it makes my blood go round so fast."

He looked up quickly. The absolute innocence of her remark contrasted oddly with what he felt she might be. Her face was strangely passionate for one so young; the passion of a devotee or artiste, never that of a woman to take life lightly. She looked a tragedienne or comedienne as her mood varied, and her heart—that he must test. No woman without a heart is really amusing to a certain type of man, because he cannot make her suffer. He drew his chair a little closer to hers.

"Now I know how little you think of me, how do you like my mother?"

"I am under great obligations to your mother," she answered haughtily, "and I find her very clever, and very beautiful and very charitable."

"Good little cousin, how wise you are! And my father?"

"I love your father, and I wish the day might come when I could show what I could and would do for him. He is so kind, so generous!"

"What would you say if I told you my father had lost all his money and my mother had to take in sewing, and I was obliged to do farming, or something equally objectionable? What could you do for my father?"

It was difficult for him to repress a smile at the thought of his mother taking in sewing; however, he turned away again to survey more dishes. Ginnie thought a moment, her little face full of serious reflection.

"I think I could be a great actress; and in the daytime I could do the house-

work and look after my aunt and uncle and study my parts, and at night I could act. Of course, I shall have to begin with humble parts, but my mother knew an actress in Italy very well, and she told me she would have me trained for the stage, and I know she would help me. I will write her at once and lose no time. She lives in Paris now. You see, your mother has always been a great lady, and she does not know how to do any work. But I often helped Felicia cook. Here you call her my maid, but in Naples she and I did all the work and washing, and nursed mother, who was never well after father left—"The blood suffused her temples. It evidently pained her to speak of him, only she was so eager to show how useful she could be. Neil's glimpse into her life in Naples almost embarrassed him. He rose.

"Come, let us go into the smoking-room. I have had all I want."

She followed him to his private sanctuary and stood on the threshold a moment.

“Don’t be frightened! You can’t leave me yet; we haven’t settled much. You know my father is far from well; what can you cook for him? And we must have a tiny cottage, possibly two rooms and a kitchen.”

“That doesn’t matter. Your parents will have one bedroom, and you and Felicia can have the other, and I will sleep in the kitchen. I can cook lentils and sausages, and spinach and macaroni, and oh, lots of good things!”

The vision was all most stimulating, and in his fancy he could see his mother taking in sewing amid the odor of lentils and sausages—and he and Felicia in the other room. She was all eagerness, when they were interrupted by some one wishing to show him a new motor at the door.

“I don’t think, Ginnie, you arranged the rooms well. Felicia might not like it.”

“Why should she mind? She is over sixty; besides that, Italian peasants are used to being crowded up with all kinds of people. They aren’t a bit fussy or

particular, and she would be so useful and help your mother a lot with the sewing."

"Yes," reflectively, "that is true, of course, if you are sure she wouldn't mind."

"Sure!"

The door was closed and she looked about her. The room was very luxurious, and lots of pretty photographs lay about; it would be hard for him to give it all up; but she for her part would not miss anything, but rejoice in the chance of proving her usefulness in the hour of trial. She longed to fling her arms around her uncle and aunt and tell them that she knew all, and was delighted at the thought of being of service to them. They were upstairs now after their morning drive; she ran to the door and along the corridor, up two steps at a time, alive with only love and gratitude in her heart toward the whole household, and the world in general. Even Neil needed her help now, and she forgot that he could not sing,

CHAPTER VI

LADY BARR took a small house-party to her country-place on the Thames for the week-end, and invited all the eligible young men for Vivien, with a few pretty married women as decoy-ducks. Mrs. Van Ebens, looking lovely in widow's half-mourning, was glad to find Neil Everett next to her at the dinner table. Vivien Nelson in virgin white, and looking as though she resented its appropriateness, sat opposite, flanked by Hamilton Fitzmaurice and Reggie Grant. The latter belonged to what Lady Barr termed the class of "the pursued." He certainly looked it, and gazed at his food as if it should be grateful to him for swallowing it. Vivien was pleased with her seat, and so was Neil, who sat on his hostess's left. He always delighted in her society, as she was not flirtatious but useful. Lord Barr was a thoroughly

good sort, and all men liked him. He was a gentleman, although not a very interesting specimen; the sort of man the casual acquaintance invariably forgot, and unless he had been introduced to a woman several times, she always said she had never met him.

Lady Barr was feeling triumphant. She enjoyed spending Mrs. Nelson's season money, and Neil had been a great deal at the house while Vivien was staying with her, and seemed to like her better all the time. She left them alone together as much as possible, and was determined to stop at nothing to make this match, understanding Neil well, as she did most men.

Mrs. Van Ebens talked to him the first part of the dinner, much to the annoyance of Sir Greville Kane, who loathed Neil, as many nice men did, and she sang the praises of his cousin Ginnie, whom she had met a day or two previously.

"I was not prepared for anything so charming. She looks like an old paint-

ing—I don't know quite what; but she suggests art and poetry and literature in an unoppressive way."

"I quite agree with you, and am delighted at what you say. She is only seventeen, but we have taken her out of school, as my father is miserable without her, and my mother is bringing her out this season. She will not go out much as she is dreadfully shy, but in time the fever will consume her like the rest of you. The flattery and the power are so entrancing. All you women live on it."

He smiled at her with open admiration. Muriel met him on his own ground.

"As long as we don't starve we must be satisfied."

"You talk in conundrums."

"That is a bromide remark! Every one finds what they look for in life, and you find—riddles, in your present mood."

"Do you really believe we get what we look for, I wonder?" He raised his head in thought.

"I not only believe that," continued Muriel, "but that we injure our spiritual vision when we search for things that are sordid and unworthy. After all it is habit that determines what we aim for. You fool yourself so much."

"But I don't want to come croppers all the time."

"Why are you afraid of croppers? Croppers are wholesome; not daring to climb high is what does us harm and leaves our mental muscles flabby."

"You certainly are a strange and interesting person! But we are off the track. We were talking about Ginnie. I am delighted that you take an interest in the child, and I wish you would take her in hand a little. She needs friends, and to be educated up to cultivating the froth of life. She digs too deep for all her sensations; you know, Muriel, how lightly our pleasures float; it is folly to examine what lies beneath them. That is the secret of happiness."

A shade of pain momentarily distorted her usually tranquil features before she

replied lightly, "Of whose happiness? But to return to your cousin Ginnie, if you ask me, a girl with that face and character can before long teach most people she meets pretty much anything she means to. At present she is only a credulous child. By the way, are you not ashamed to have played the trick on her that you did last week, telling her about your mother taking in sewing? It was wicked."

Neil threw back his head with delighted laughter.

"It was splendid. Can't you picture Mother sewing unmentionables for all her smart friends in London, and Felicia and I doing Darby and Joan in the other room?—only Felicia's taste was consulted, please observe! the adored Felicia. And poor Father, who can with the greatest difficulty digest a crumb, living on sausages and lentils cooked by the Oriental vision in a pink pinafore! If she grew angry with me she would throw the pan of hot fat in my face, I am sure! However, 'all's well that ends well.' She

rushed up to Mother after my tale of woe—they had before been on most formal terms—clasped Mother by instalments in her arms and sobbed out sympathy and promises, and repeated the performance to Father, while Mother was trying to decide which asylum to send her to. Fancy Mother's feelings when she said, 'We will do lots of work together and earn lots of money, for I can help do your sewing, Neil told me.' There the cat jumped out of the bag. Mother is not easily amused, but she was then."

"Yes, your mother was very funny about it, but she was touched by the child's goodness of heart, and keenness, and real gratitude. She feels now she can't do enough for her, and has almost forgiven her for not being a boy."

"Oh, rather! You see what a good turn I have done Ginnie, how I have cemented her to mother's heart, all through ——"

"Curiosity?"

"Exactly, curiosity."

Lady Barr touched Neil's hand with

her fan. "You have talked to Muriel quite enough, tell me about your cousin Ginnie. I hear she has a lovely voice and figure, and I want you to bring her to lunch with me one day next week in Berkeley Square. There are one or two men dying to meet her before she is spoiled by society. What does she look like?"

"That is rather hard to define. The sort of person that never slips unnoticed through a crowd, not because she is beautiful, large or small, but one always feels Ginnie is there. She has infinite tenderness, and I never knew a woman to have the real thing before."

"I can close my eyes and see her. Mind you bring her on Wednesday. By the way, I must congratulate you on your speech last night. They tell me you have a future, even your enemies, as I attach some importance to the report. Your speech did not sound like a turn-coat's."

"What a rabid Free Trader you are!"

"So are you, at heart."

"But what future have they?"

"For heaven's sake don't let any of these men hear you! What principles guide you, Neil? They hate you enough in the house as it is. I would hate you too, only I never allow myself to hate any one. Every hate is a handicap or a wrinkle; and you interest me."

"Yes, I know, but you could never be fond of me?"

"No, and that is why you like to come here and feel safe. I can't think any one would grow fond of you unless they were very young."

"Perhaps not."

They sat silent. Ginnie's face rose up before him, and he felt the nearest approach to affection he had ever felt. What would it feel like to have the love of a woman like that? who would fry sausages and lentils as gladly as wear the most beautiful tiara in London. What could he do to make her fond of him? Lady Barr interrupted his reverie.

"I can't wait until Wednesday. Can you not motor up to London to-morrow

and bring your cousin Ginnie back to us for lunch? I am impatient to see her.”

The idea pleased Neil. He determined to begin his conquest at once, and looked forward to the struggle.

CHAPTER VII.

STANHOLME PARK looked its loveliest to Neil that Sunday morning in early May, with Felicia and the chauffeur as chaperones, and Ginnie by his side, radiant with delight and blissfully unconscious of his inability to drive a car. Neil had overcome his mother's ideas of propriety in taking his cousin to Lady Barr's for lunch without a chaperone. Through intricate, pointless argument he had wheedled his parents into believing it was the chance of her life, without being able to prove why to either, and he had made Ginnie feel he was a Good Samaritan, befriending her in a desert she was about to enter. He told her it was her duty to go, as Lady Barr needed an extra girl, and poor little Ginnie was too green to know that never in England is an extra girl needed. He assured her she need not be shy, as she would be the prettiest woman there, and

that Lady Barr and Mrs. Van Ebens were his dearest friends, and would be as nice as possible to her; indeed, he only hoped she would not be spoiled.

Ginnie drank it all in, and by the time they reached the gate was as keen for her first glimpse of society as he was to introduce her. They whizzed up the avenue of elm trees and drew up under the vine-clad porte-cochere.

Lady Barr and Mrs. Van Ebens were playing croquet with a couple of men, and came forward to meet them. Ginnie looked up shyly at them both, and with a quick impulse felt that Muriel was her friend. She still clung to her hand after the welcome extended to her. The scent of spring flowers was strong in the air, and below them the silver thread of water was alive with voices of happiness and laughter. She felt dumb with gratitude for having simply seen it. Neil, as always, a spectator of life, watched her curiously.

Felicia, in a whirl of excitement, had dressed Ginnie for lunch in a clinging

white crepe dress, with a bunch of gardenias at her breast, exquisite in her simplicity. As she walked into the dining-room all eyes were upon her. She sat between Lord Barr and Reggie Grant. Her charm for old men was fatal, and before the meal was over her host was practically at her feet. Mr. Grant was a little frightened. She did not belong to the ranks of the pursuers, and he belonged to the ranks of the "pursued." Hunting was the only thing to him that made life worth living, and she disagreed with him about it. What an odd girl! She said she could never respect any man whose chief joy it was to kill, and told him she believed all people had guardian angels and the spirits of the dead watching over them.

"You make me feel quite creepy." He laughed and shuddered nervously. "I should hate to think that. Horrid unsettled spirits about one!"

She turned her great serious eyes upon him with a look of genuine contempt.

"If you are afraid of the dead you

should be afraid to live. I suppose you are a type. Neil said I should meet all types."

"Yes, I suppose I am," he murmured humbly, and turned to Vivien Nelson, who sat watching with curved lip, trying to glean what she could for repetition. She was a woman who never listened from either sympathy or interest, but solely for the market she could make of gathered information. In other words, she was a "small talker," anxious to harvest.

Lady Barr would not listen to Ginnie going back to London after lunch. She begged her to stay the night, as there was to be some music in the evening, and Mr. Fitzmaurice wanted to give her a punting lesson, and Neil to show her the village church. Lord Barr was sure she would be interested in his collection of birds' eggs, so all considered, she was prevailed upon to remain on the condition that Lord Frost would not be alone. She telephoned up to London and found that Lady Frost

was dining at home with him, so, in a borrowed tea-gown, Ginnie appeared at her first dinner party, for which several people had motored down from London. She swept into the drawing-room, almost the last, in flesh-colored chiffon trimmed with wild roses, her dark hair coiled low on her neck. Her supple figure showed through the clouds of fluff, and she wore no other jewels than the two sparkling gems God had placed in her head. After dinner several men asked to be presented, and by the time the music had begun she had appropriated a high chair in one corner of the room, surrounded by a small court, discussing art and the crops with equal facility. Neil had expressed it correctly. It was her infinite tenderness that attracted one and all. Who could but feel it? The footman and the housemaid came under the spell.

People were moving about and resettling themselves before the music began. All the electric lights were turned out and only two candles burned on the

stage, throwing their ghostly flicker over the bowed head of the tragic hero of the *Ballade des Désespérés*. As the violin and voice interpreted the pathetic tale of de Musset, and the harp-strings quivered in long broken chords of sweetest mystery and sorrow, all the audience surrendered themselves to the spell of sympathy woven by Bemberg's wondrous music. When in the end the Angel of Death took the man who had prayed for the life of his dog, that one living creature might be left to mourn him, Ginnie could no longer control her sobs. Mortified as she felt when the lights were again turned on, she was gratefully conscious of the sympathy of Hamilton Fitzmaurice, who sat beside her. And she shivered as she said to him, "How near the dead seem!" He was about to make some answer thoroughly in touch with her mood, when he was hopelessly distracted by a longing look from Grantley at the empty chair on the other side.

"That is certainly marvellous music!"

he observed. "I feel like beginning again where de Musset left off, careless fellow, and writing more ballads about the little dog. I feel a good deal of interest in that little dog, and I expect it had a long yellow body with a curly tail and a black nose."

"O don't, don't!" exclaimed Ginnie, smiling through her tears.

Grantley could no longer resist the temptation of edging near them. He stood and listened to her laugh at some of Hamilton's nonsense. She had the sweetest laughter in the world, the physical mirth with the note of sadness in it, as if whatever joy came to her was gratefully appreciated. Grantley had never asked to be introduced to a woman before, but the time was flying, and he looked appealingly at Hamilton, who pretended not to see him, and only talked more earnestly and looked more tenderly. At last he had mercy on his friend, and said to Ginnie in a loud voice so that Bertie could not help hearing:

"There is a poor unfortunate devil here to-night nobody wants to speak to, standing alone looking at me with envy, hatred and malice. With your kind nature I know you will allow him to be presented to you and throw him a few words."

"Of course, I shall be delighted to meet any friend of yours. What is his trouble?"

Hamilton in convulsions called Bertie, and carefully omitting his name, said with a flourish of his right hand as Grantley stood before her:

"Miss Allerti, will you allow me to present my friend? Bertie, she asked me what your trouble was, but I thought you could explain it better yourself." With a low bow to the vision in the high-backed chair he left the two alone and disappeared in the back of the room.

Grantley flushed to the roots of his hair, and would have given anything he possessed to shake Hamilton. Ginnie turned several shades of red before she resumed her normal pallor. She looked

up so sweetly at him as she extended her hand in welcome that he almost wished he had a trouble to confess at her knee and receive her blessing and forgiveness. However, they soon were talking together quite easily, first about the music, then about abstract subjects as if they had known each other all their lives, although she still had no idea who he was. Her mind was very retentive of anything she had seen or heard, and her knowledge of art and literature extraordinary for a girl so young.

"How came you to know so much about the joys and beauties of life at your age?" he asked. "I am sure the music to-night has conveyed more to you than to any one else here."

"Ah, yes, it said much to me. I love all things beautiful, and what we love we learn to find." She put her head on one side and looked up into his serious young face, confident of sympathy. "Don't you think so too?"

"You have been much with grown

people in your childhood, one can see. Your early youth was not played away."

"No, indeed," she said wistfully, "not played away." Then with a sudden effort at cheerfulness she continued: "I will tell you about myself, and then you must tell me about yourself. I like your name, Bertie, so much. It is such a pretty name. My mother had a beautiful big fuzzy Persian cat called Bertie."

"Indeed! I am glad you have pleasant associations with the name."

"On the contrary, I haven't with the cat. It bit me and finally died in a fit. But I liked the name and always said my first child should be called Bertie."

"How unfortunate about that beautiful fuzzy cat! My people are all very strong, and the family never was given to fits. I hope to redeem my good name."

She laughed delightedly, catching the merriment in his eyes.

"Come now, Miss Allerti, tell me about yourself. I know you were brought up in Italy. What else?"

She crossed one knee lightly over the other, and from beneath the ruffles of lace and chiffon there peeped the most beautiful little foot and ankle Grantley had ever seen. The slipper was several sizes too large and only held on with difficulty by keeping the toe upturned. It suddenly fell off after her change of position. With perfect unconsciousness she slipped her foot into it again, only remarking, that "borrowed plumes, however lovely, did not always fit." Then she told him simply about her poverty and the hard work of her childhood. She had occasionally acted herself, and loved the great Italian tragedienne, Mme. R., dearly.

"I have heard of her," he said, "but have never met her."

"You have something to live for, then!" exclaimed Ginnie, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "When I sang in the streets because we were hungry and my mother was ill, you cannot think what a friend Mme. R. was to us. She stopped in her carriage to hear me the first time,

and the second time she was passing she waited until I had finished and drove me home to my mother. She looked so lovely and rich, and her clothes were so graceful and soft. I don't know why I tell you all this—but I suppose it is because I feel that you too have known trouble, and like me know what it is to be an outcast."

The Duke winced, but Ginnie did not see it. Hamilton's joke, which at first had distinctly annoyed him, was certainly bringing him almost embarrassing confidences and a very delicious friendship.

"Then did your mother and the actress become friends?"

"Yes, from that day. I went out of the room for a little while, and when I came back I found them crying in each other's arms. You must meet Mme. R. to know what a truly great lady is like. If I were in distress I would rather go to her than to any one in the whole world. She seems to reach out to poor humanity and try to give it what she must have missed in life, and—O how she makes one cry

at the theatre! If I have to work again for my living I mean to be an actress. I couldn't bear to be idle, could you?"

She looked up into his bewildered face. Grantley had forgotten the room and its people. He was in Italy, throwing pennies to a child singing in the streets, singing because she was hungry. When she had finished he was throwing his entire income and was ready to mortgage his house. Ginnie's lack of reserve and self-consciousness rather frightened him. He had pried more deeply into her life than he meant to. She was only proud of the conquest over misery. How many people would have been ashamed of it! He trembled for her future and her loneliness in England, where such a temperament is hardly understood. It would mislead nine men out of ten. She laid her hand impulsively on his.

"Forgive me if I have talked too much. There was something about you made me like you at once, Mr. Bertie."

He smiled and withdrew his hand, but kept his eyes fixed on her face. "You

are a very wonderful child. You have put oxygen into my lungs. I must meet your Mme. R. I have not misunderstood you. Everything you have said to me is a secret between us." Grantley leaned close to her. She drew back quickly.

"It makes my head swim so dreadfully to be very near people I like. Does yours never do that?"

She drew a short little breath and smiled up at him with such innocent pleasure that he felt ashamed of himself, and evading an answer, said:

"Your uncle is a very cultivated man. I think you will delight in talking to him. I must run in and see him again when I find time. You and I are friends already."

Just at that moment Mrs. Van Ebens came up and joined them.

CHAPTER VIII.

“**Y**OU must not mind my interrupting you both, but it will save my writing notes if you will both come and dine with me on Monday night. I am going to have a sort of vaudeville entertainment in my drawing-room after dinner.”

Grantley said he had not an engagement for the next ten years that could not be broken for such an entertainment. Muriel laughed softly.

“How nice you always are, Bertie! But you know how careful I am that you are never to be bored in my house!”

“Mine always has been a grateful nature,” he said, rising a trifle late.

Muriel and Ginnie walked upstairs en route for bed, arm in arm.

“Who is that nice man, Bertie?”

“O, I’m so glad you like him, Miss Allerti, because I am devoted to him! He is my ideal, I think, of an English

gentleman. Very clever too, if he would apply himself seriously to a career, and so unspoiled. He had a very remarkable mother; the Duchess of Grantley was not only a woman of rare fascination, but of great influence for good. Bertie misses her dreadfully. He has never gone anywhere much since her death."

"So he is a duke!"

"Yes. What did you think he was?"

"Why, I hardly know. Mr. Fitzmaurice told me he was a sort of an out-cast."

Muriel was highly amused. "Really, Hamilton Fitzmaurice is incorrigible! Grantley is more run after than any man in London, and all the scheming mammas are panting for him. Besides," she said, dropping her voice, "this, my dear, is not a house where one is apt to meet out-casts!"

She kissed the girl good-night just as Lady Barr came up to hand them each a candle.

Lady Barr followed Vivien Nelson into her room.

"I hope you will not be disturbed by Neil Everett's midnight walks. He tells me he rehearses all his speeches tramping up and down before an imaginary audience, and as he speaks to-morrow in the House I tremble for you."

"No, I don't hear him, and it gives one a nice safe feeling to know that in case of fire or burglars a man is near. I am so dreadfully timid." She shook her large body in anticipation of horrors.

Lady Barr had seated herself on a low chair in front of Vivien's tempting fire, and slowly began taking off her jewels.

"It sounds very worldly for me to talk to you in this way, Vivien, dear, but you might as well realize that you are the only match in London that Lady Frost wants for Neil, and the one woman he should marry. He is only flirting with his cousin as a blind and you really must make some effort now to bring things to a point. He must be made to feel that he has compromised you in his selfishness."

Vivien shrugged her shoulders. More

thoughts however passed through her head than anyone gave her credit for, and before Lady Barr had kissed her good-night her mind was made up.

It was not long before Vivien heard Neil's footsteps going to his room and the locking of his door. She scrutinized herself closely before her mirror, as she combed out her long blond hair. A soft "*sortie de lit*" covered her filmy nightgown. She saw herself as she was, and she even realized that she owed her virtue to lack of moral courage. But now she was desperate. His mother wanted it; her mother wanted it, and she wanted it; and Vivien had been brought up to feel that whatever she wanted was a necessity. Finances were at a very low ebb; tradespeople were bothering her for their money, and it vexed her to see several of her less fashionable friends engaged before her. So she determined to compromise herself with Neil at whatever cost to her good name; force him to marry her by trying to appeal to his senses. The brute in him was always

apparent under the polished manners and smart clothes.

She drew out the muslin curtain from her dressing-table, prepared a jug of water and blanket to throw over it, and then deliberately set fire to it. She ran over on tiptoe to Neil's door, and called "Fire! Fire!" Neil rushed to the rescue. Vivien was already pouring water on the flames, which had crept up faster than she had anticipated. He tore off his coat and extinguished the rest, after which she fell on the floor at his feet as if in a faint. The candle-light flickered across her face and bare throat, and the cape of golden curls half covered her arms. They were alone together. Neil enjoyed watching her; there was no hurry bringing her to; all women fainted more or less, and came to safely. He knelt down beside her, and laid his hand on her heart. She opened her eyes slowly, and stretched out her hand toward him.

"You have saved my life! How can I thank you, Mr. Everett?"

"Don't mention it," he answered cold-

ly. "There was really no danger. I suppose you were frightened, but not hurt, I hope?"

"No not hurt, but dreadfully frightened, and I feel terrified now and shaking all over."

"Had I better call Lady Barr?"

"O no, I shall be quite calm in a minute."

"But then it would look odd, if any one were to pass your door and hear us talking in here."

"Oh!" with well-feigned surprise. "I never thought of that! It seems so natural to trust you and rely on you. I feel so absolutely safe with you."

Neil rather fancied himself in this new *rôle*. A timid knock on the door opening into the next room on the right startled them.

"What is it?" cried Vivien, jumping up with sudden alacrity.

"Are you in trouble, Miss Nelson?"

It was Ginnie's voice; she had been given the small room adjoining.

"Come in," said Neil coolly.

Vivien blushed with confusion. Ginnie opened the door; her two dark braids hung heavily over her shoulders, and the bedspread was thrown over her as a dressing-gown. Her lovely feet were bare, and Neil thought he had never seen anything more exquisite than the picture she made as she stood before them. There was no mock modesty or embarrassment; she had been awakened out of a sound sleep and thought she heard some one call or cry, and came to the rescue. The walls were thick and she could not hear distinctly.

Neil told her that the room had been on fire, and that he luckily heard Miss Nelson scream before he began to undress. Ginnie, of course, thought him a hero. He went on to explain how nervous Miss Nelson had been after her shock, and he wished to quiet her by talking to her. Ginnie then begged to stay and sleep with her, which offer Vivien accepted with little grace, and Neil, with a bow, went back to his own room. When the

lights were turned out the two girls talked a little, but Vivien could get nothing out of Ginnie which she did not mean to tell, and soon fell into a disappointed sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY FROST took it upon herself to give a dance for her niece, soon after Ginnie's return to London, and before she knew what she was doing, found herself taking her everywhere as her own daughter, very proud of her and interested in the success she was having with old and young of both sexes. Her bewitching gentle manners and grace of bearing appealed to all. However, when an offer of marriage from a prospective earl was rejected, her aunt was undisguisedly annoyed, and could only think she had an eye on Neil, though his attentions were not marked in his mother's presence.

Neil was not looking or feeling well. The questionable tactics he had employed at his election two years ago had not contributed to his popularity. Besides, his manners to all he considered his inferiors, and they were many, were so

insolent that he had few friends, although there was no one who could be more charming than he, when he wished. No fundamental principles guided his life, and he was tossed about by his different moods and passions, trying not to think or feel or suffer for any one but himself. He had had a tiresome interview with Lady Barr, to whom Vivien had confided the fire incident, and who maintained that he had compromised the girl and should at once propose to her. Neil was not of the same opinion, and argued that he could not do less than put out a fire in her room when she screamed for help. Lady Barr granted that; but she said people had heard him talking in there, or Ginnie had been indiscreet, and she believed it would hurt his career very much not to play up like a gentleman at a time when people were wagging their tongues about a spotless character. Neil had been asked to play up before and was wary; but he liked Vivien in his own way, and it was the match his mother wanted, and he felt vaguely she would be his ultimate fate.

He told Lady Barr he would think about it, and honestly meant to for the moment, but as usual the unexpected happened.

When he came home that afternoon he found Ginnie in tears in his mother's boudoir. Lady Frost, looking anything but tender, was seated in a high-backed chair glaring at the fire. He gave her his customary filial kiss, and walking over to Ginnie, laid his hand on her head kindly, saying:

"What is the trouble, my child? What is it, mother?"

Ginnie gave only muffled sobs, face downwards, and his mother one or two snorts before she answered:

"Ridiculous nonsense! Girls are a great trial with all their odd ideas. Ginnie has refused Reggie Grant for no reason at all; she told me to tell him, which I did; then he tried to see her and win her, and she tells him she will marry him on one condition, and that she will communicate the condition through me. To-day she comes to me—she really is a silly girl. I can't think a girl of almost

eighteen would have so little sense. She tells me she will accept if he will sign a paper promising never to kiss or touch her. Fancy my bringing such a message to a man who is to inherit an earldom, or to any man for that matter!"

Neil had mixed feelings of amusement and pity. Ginnie was a child to whom the instinct of mating had never come. In this lay her greatest charm, her absolute unconsciousness of her own physical power. She would require long and ardent wooing. He had been trying to read her character and awaken some of her possibilities, and he did not want any one to snatch her just yet. He must calm this whirlpool, and show his tact on both sides. He asked his mother to leave him alone with the girl, adding in an undertone: "Of course it is nonsense, but she must be carefully handled or she will skip off and go on the stage, or do something odd and mortifying."

Lady Frost clasped her hands in momentary misery, and left the room, telling Neil he would find her in the

library with his father when he wanted her.

When they were alone, Neil drew up his chair beside Ginnie.

“There, little girl, let me comfort you. Of course I understand. Tell me all about it.” He laid his arm caressingly over her shoulder, and prepared to listen, like the spectator of a drama, full of curiosity.

“Oh, Neil!” She turned her tear-stained face full upon him. “Oh, Neil, I have never had a man kiss me or want to, in my whole life, and the day Reggie Grant told me he loved me he frightened me so! He tried to kiss me, and I had an awful struggle to push his face away; and I don’t mind marrying him if Uncle wants me to, but I just want an understanding, like a settlement, you know, that he should not expect to kiss me. Aunt Ruth told me my Uncle wanted me to marry, and you know I would do anything in the world for Uncle. I don’t want to be a care to them. They have been so kind to

me. But Mr. Grant and I aren't sympathetic; we seem to speak a different language, and I have never been very nice to him. I can't think why he should want to kiss me."

"Neither can I," agreed Neil, as soberly as he could.

"The Duke of Grantley is so different. Mr. Grant and I almost quarrelled when I first met him at Lady Barr's; but lately he has taken me in to dinner several times, and it was all such a surprise—how could he love me so soon? It upset me so—that horrid scene with him. He looked so queer, and his eyes were bloodshot, and—you can't think how awfully he looked!" Ginnie covered her face with her hands, as if to protect her from her memories.

"Of course. Ridiculous fellow, not to have understood you better! Some women, dear, like to be kissed. They get used to it, you know. You mustn't be hard on him, he is a good fellow."

"Yes, if one loved a man one would love to be kissed, but surely no women

get used to being kissed if they don't love the man. Felicia says that at some time in a woman's life she finds one man, whom she loves and who loves her; and they want to marry, and that is natural." After this information Ginnie looked at him again. He did not look as impressed as he should, so she went on: "I can understand that perfectly. Surely, cousin Neil, you can fancy, under certain circumstances, how you could love a woman and want her all for your own, to take away somewhere and just be alone together, and kiss her all the time, when you weren't looking at beautiful things, pictures, you know, and statues and scenery." She clasped her hands in ecstasy, waiting breathless for his reply. He never in his life before had felt himself such a hypocrite.

"Yes. I can imagine some day perhaps wanting to kiss a woman. Reggie has proved himself a careless duffer, he—he—" words failed him, and in his breast there arose a greater sympathy

for the tactless suitor than he had felt at first.

“You feel then, Ginnie, that some day it would not be irksome to you to put your arms around a man?” He spoke as lightly as he could.

“Yes, yes! Not as I kiss Uncle either, mind you.” Her voice was alive with sudden passion. “I love Uncle more than any one in the world, but I can understand a different love; and that man must be living somewhere to-day; and I often wonder what he is like. And O, how I would admire and trust him! I feel as if I wanted to begin to look for him.”

“You might have to look for a long time, and a long way.”

“Never mind, even if I only found him as I was stepping into my grave; so that I could say before I died, ‘I have beheld my ideal, and been beloved for my soul.’ ”

“That is given to very, very few women to say.”

“Low aim, not failure, is a crime!”

she quoted defiantly, as she rose and stood before him. Her head was thrown back and she brushed a stray lock of hair from her brow. "Neil, you don't know how much I have suffered from false love; and I want—to be good."

"You speak in conundrums, child. You are an angel, absolutely unsoiled from the world; it is too wonderful to me. Bad as I am, I can at least appreciate you, and in my heart I place you upon a pedestal of solid gold, to worship."

The music of his deep voice stirred her. He did not trust himself to look at her but went on:

"What do you mean by false love? What do you know of such things, in your search for the one man who somewhere is waiting for you, to love and kiss him?"

"You know my dear mother ran away with an Italian? I feel I can tell you about this, you are so kind and good to me."

She laid her hand shyly in his strong, hot grasp.

“Yes, I knew that. Were they happy? It was not so awful, was it? He sang beautifully, I think you said?”

“Yes, he was a music teacher, and he wrote plays and poems, and was, oh, so clever—and oh, so poor; and he promised to marry her—”

“Promised?” with surprise.

“Yes, promised. Then he was angry because Uncle did not send them any money, and after a few weeks he said he wouldn’t, and said he hoped it would mortify Uncle. But Uncle never knew, because Mother loved him so much, and didn’t want him to know. She didn’t want him to be mortified. It nearly killed her. Then after a while Mother began to act at the theatre in Naples, and we sang for coppers in the street, and Mme. R. sometimes kept us from starving. One day Mother came to me and said Father had gone away never to return. He was tired of being the husband of a great lady. She cried dreadfully, and said it was because her beauty had gone and Father had only

loved her body, not her soul; for if he had he would not have cared less for her had she been crippled, bedridden, old or mad; he would have loved her. I can remember now setting my teeth and feeling all she said to me. Oh, it was so awful to see her cry, and grow pale and thin and sick! I sang in the streets and acted my songs, and crowds would gather. They were very good to me. Nobody knew anything about us except that we were English, but Mme. R., who had known Father first, because he once wrote a play for her, and it was her first great success. So she helped us. She got to know us later by accident. Felicia sewed for us and nursed Mother—and you know the rest. Mother gave me the little education I had up to the time I was fourteen. She knew so much and was so cultivated. She taught me to love to study and read, and told me all about the beautiful things and places in the world. And, oh, how she loved your father! She said she never wanted him to know

how she had been degraded and that I was an illegitimate child. Mother had a wonderful dream sent her by the angels as a warning of her death, and she wrote to England to Uncle telling him that she would send me to him. But through a mistake it was not posted for several days, which is the reason Felicia and I arrived the same day as the letter. After a few days she died in my arms, and asked me never to marry until I was sure the man loved my soul best."

Ginnie rose and turned her face to the fire, resting heavily on the mantel. After hearing her tragedy Neil partially understood her childish desire for such a strange agreement. Her exquisite purity, brought into close contact with evil and poverty, was most surprising. She was not what he would have chosen for the mother of his children. Yet the desire to awaken all the possibilities of her nature became all too strong for him. He had been trying, and he knew how successfully, to

weave a web about her. He understood women, and he deliberately tried to make her trust and care for him, and it had not always been an easy task to keep himself under perfect control. She was the only girl who had ever had the slightest charm for him, and he felt sure that even if he could make her marry him, the wooing of her after marriage would be no easy thing. She had the difficulties of temperament to handle that all young geniuses have; and was it wise to cope with a genius, full of strange fancies and ideals? How could he always live up to them if he was too much tempted? And he knew that, even now, she herself tempted him in a thousand ways, though he still was a little afraid of her.

She had shown no desire to withdraw her hand from his.

“You used to hate me, didn’t you?”

She felt him quiver as he asked the question.

“Yes. There is sometimes a look in your face I don’t like. You wouldn’t

have me lie to you, would you, cousin Neil?" Her troubled eyes looked full into his.

"Certainly not. You couldn't anyhow. But you like me a little now, don't you?"

Ginnie pressed his fingers.

"I care a great deal for you now, and I think I understand you better. You are very moody—very spoiled—but very clever and kind-hearted."

He drew his hand away; he could not bear the strain any longer, and shrugging his shoulders said laughingly:

"Very wrong, but very indulgent." Then he added in a more serious tone, "You would not be unhappy to give up Reggie Grant and the prospect of being a countess to remain here with us?"

Ginnie almost jumped for joy. "I don't want to leave here. I love the place and the people, but I would only marry him to please those who have been so kind to me; but I couldn't have him kiss me. He must sign that paper promising not to do so, if I marry him."

"Do you think you could ever love me,

and want to marry me, if I signed a paper promising not to touch you, and laid it at your feet with a prayer for my happiness?"

He thrilled her to her innermost being. She clasped her hands on her breast, and looked at him speechless with open mouth. He thought he had not said enough, and after a moment's pause spoke again:

"I am not good enough for you, but I love you—I want you to marry me at once—at once!"

He felt her hot breath against his cheek, and his head was reeling, cold-blooded as he was. This woman had from the first affected him strangely. He had struggled against it, but for the moment his efforts were vain, and now, with the intoxication of his imagination, he could hardly wait for her answer, although he was sure she would accept him. There was, however, always a glorious uncertainty about Ginnie. She shook her head, and at last her scarlet lips moved in speech.

"No, no. Uncle must not know about

me, and you should not marry without telling your parents all about your wife; and—and yet, oh Neil, the joy of feeling you love my soul better than my body, the feeling that you willingly offer to sign the paper that Aunt Ruth thought would be such an insult! It is too wonderful and good to be true. And I hope and pray my dear mother in heaven can look down on us and know God has sent me what she missed in life.”

She stretched her strong young arms out to him with a sudden dramatic gesture; but he was afraid, and pretended not to see them. She was ready to kiss him then, he was sure. The web was built securely, the fly had touched it. The rest was a question of time and struggling. At least, in spite of her refusal, she was safe from other men.

Lady Frost opened the door and saw Ginnie with arms outstretched, her face illuminated with a new emotion, and Neil apparently unmoved beside her.

“I thought you were never coming, Neil. I am taking Father out for a little

drive, and we want Ginnie. Fetch your things directly, my dear."

Lady Frost had never called Ginnie "my dear" before. She was most affable, and turning to Neil said:

"Muriel Van Ebens has just been here, and she wants you and Ginnie to dine with her to-night to fill some places. It seems the Duke of Grantley is quite off his head about Ginnie, and Reggie Grant is to be there too, and all the eligible parties. It would be nice for the child, and I have accepted. I hear an uncle of Muriel's has died and left her a lot of money. She looks wonderfully young for her age, and is so clever and so kind. She has made an extraordinarily good position for herself in England, when you think she came from very plain people; but she has developed a marked personality."

Neil was a little surprised at this burst of admiration, and was not very attentive.

"You will go to-night?"

"Yes, I will go."

CHAPTER X.

WHEN their turn around the park was over, Lady Frost told Ginnie to drive home with her uncle while she herself stopped at Lady Barr's house in Park Lane for tea. The Hall entrance was heavily scented with Vervein, and the three footmen with powdered hair and white silk stockings stood exactly six feet high. Lady Frost was ushered up the marble staircase, through the folding doors, and found Lady Barr sitting in an atmosphere of "*brule-parfum*" with a very smart young man, holding his hat firmly on his knees, in a chair opposite her. The shy caller left soon after the ladies had shaken hands, and Lady Frost seized on the moment to tell her friend what a dreadful state she was in over the discovery that Ginnie had designs on Neil.

She told her what she had seen of the tableau that afternoon, and she had come

straight to "dear" Lady Barr for advice. Though not necessarily for the sake of following it, her peculiar line of flattery was asking advice. Lady Barr was really shocked. Her promised cheque might even now be fluttering away from her in some unexpected high wind. Not that she disliked Ginnie, or wished to knife her in the back, but she needed money, and if Ginnie was in the way, the way must be cleared.

"You won't mind my being frank with you, will you, dear Lady Frost, but I think if Neil marries his cousin, his career will be ruined, quite independently of his having compromised Vivien Nelson, that all her friends—and most nice thinking people besides—will have nothing to do with him if he marries any one else. Besides, I gather from what you have told me, there is something peculiar about Miss Allerti—some—some skeleton in the cupboard, isn't there?"

"Well, ahem—I suppose one would call it a skeleton. Of course, I have never asked her about her parents. Her

mother was a black sheep, and as for her father—a fearful Italian adventurer; a singing teacher who wrote her poems while my husband was paying for her lessons! I don't know that there is any other skeleton.”

“Well, I call that skeleton enough. I say, on general principles, most people have skeletons, and if they are not in evidence, it is safe to presume they are locked away. I should think your niece was the sort of person who would answer you candidly any questions you cared to ask.”

“Yes, I think she would,” answered Lady Frost. Then she sat silent a few moments, planning in her mind how, out of Ginny's honesty, she could prepare a noose in which to hang her. Ginny must of course be sacrificed for the sake of Neil's career, and Lady Frost felt that the Almighty arranged things, with her help, more than she did with His. She fancied her campaign of life was not to be interfered with, and she seldom realized her own failures.

"I can't understand it, but oddly enough, Neil is not popular. And you really think that his not marrying Vivien will make him still less so?"

"I think it would finish him. Besides that, Vivien is madly in love with him. She is jealous of every woman he speaks to and talks about him night and day. She is wholesome, young and well-bred, and is in every way suitable, and as I told you, he has compromised her, and in my own house too, in a way that would make it impossible for me, for one, to receive him if he does not marry her. These stories get about you know, and as I say, it would finish him. After all, in England, men have still a few rules of honor left—not many, I grant you—but they are rigid. A 'gentleman' can break one or two of them, but he can't break them all."

She was getting excited, a thing she rarely did, and she felt too much was at stake not to play her last card well. She poured herself out another cup of tea, so black it was undrinkable, and went on.

“We know he talks about women—”

“Talks about women; what do you mean?” almost shrieked Lady Frost.

“Talks about his relations with them! That’s the first rule broken. Then he compromises girls and doesn’t live up to his obligations—the second rule. I won’t go on, but I pray you will not allow him to break the second rule. About gambling debts he is all right. Poor Neil, he can’t remember his pros and cons, and still I am devoted to him. Oh, I have told him all this to his face, so I feel at liberty to talk to his mother!”

She drew from her sleeve an exquisite scrap of lace disguised as a handkerchief and brushed the crumbs from her dress; then she laughed lightly and said:

“We must not get too serious and break the rules my beauty doctor lays down for eternal youth!”

Lady Frost sighed. “I think,” she said, “it can all be managed with a little tact.” ‘Tact’ being her conception of the part she meant to play. Inwardly she was furious, and though glad that

she had heard it, resented all that had been told her of her son. So she determined to stop at nothing to prevent this marriage, for what else could those outstretched arms mean? Ginnie could not stand there indefinitely and he not yield to her call. She was not the girl a man could trifle with, and besides, Lady Frost believed in her heart that Neil must have said a good deal to her to make her hold out her arms to him with such a look in her eyes.

"I am disappointed in Neil's speeches too," went on his mother querulously. "They lack conviction."

"He lacks conviction," Lady Barr retorted with an unpleasant ring in her usually sweet voice.

"Yes, they lack conviction," repeated Lady Frost, not noticing the remark. "He has a remarkable delivery, but his own sex does not seem to find his power of persuasion as irresistible as does the opposite. He never seems to be taken seriously, and yet I feel confident that he has great latent power."

“Well, Lady Frost, you and I must do all we can to get him safely and respectably married. His wife can do all the civil things he leaves undone; and perhaps a match between your niece and the Duke of Grantley can be brought about shortly. He seems much attracted to her now, and besides, he collects curios. I don’t mean that is a reason for his wanting to collect her, but anyway he certainly has a taste for odds and ends.”

Lady Frost rose and walked over to the fireplace, where on the mantel stood a photograph of Vivien Nelson.

“She is indeed a sweet, amiable creature, and I only hope that one day she will be mistress of Everett House. And now, good-bye, dear Lady Barr, I must thank you for sparing me so much of your time. It has been a great relief and comfort to talk to you.”

Lady Frost left the room, carrying her head so high that she tripped over the white bear rug, and narrowly missed a bad fall.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was nearly midnight when Neil came up to take Ginnie home from Mrs. Van Eben's dinner. Ginnie was sorry to leave. She had more courage now in her social career, and felt a few people had other feelings for her besides those of mere curiosity. She had sat between Reggie Grant and the Duke of Grantley. In a room full of people she had dared to indulge in many tender looks towards her former violent suitor, and convinced that self-satisfied person that she had only been playing with him before and would surely promise to marry him the next time he saw her quietly and had leisure in which to persuade her what a really fine fellow he was. He twirled his moustache impatiently, looking about the table, and the Duke seized the opportunity to engage her attention. Although the intoxication of the lights and the music were still in

her veins, with Grantley she became instantly serious. Neil sat opposite with Vivien Nelson, his eyes, however, always across the table.

Grantley had waited patiently for his chance, amused at her gaiety and new playful mood. He had seldom found himself next to her at dinner, and his mourning prevented their meeting at balls; since her appearance in London he had revived his old acquaintance with the Frosts, and so had contrived to gain a few golden moments with Ginnie, the only girl in London who had never bored him. But that was a long way from being in love. He was not going to marry for the sake of an heir, and, after all, his younger brother was the father of five delightful boys.

Ginnie had never analyzed her feelings for him. A man's goodness does not stir the blood of youth as it will in an older woman. She had a deep affection for him, rather like the one she had for her uncle. Grantley was too honorable ever to arouse a feeling he could not

be sure of being able to return. He never flattered her, while he always interested her. She had no suspicion of how much he liked her, as she always saw him when there were older or more important people to monopolize him. He felt that she trusted him implicitly, but in this he was no exception, as she trusted everyone. She never made any further reference to her sad childhood, but the broken barrier made them feel more intimate than they really were, and although Ginnie might not have noticed Grantley's special deference to her, it was not unobserved by others.

It was hard to believe that Neil and Bertie were ever associates in anything; they were so totally different. Neil's high-bred sharp features and graceful easy bearing made him always pleasant to look at when he wanted to be agreeable. A very different personality showed in his other moods, when he felt insolent or bored. Loss of sleep was responsible for a good deal, and as he had no control of his emotions his charms varied. He

was unreasonably irritated by Bertie's attitude towards Ginnie. The child had confessed she liked Grantley, his mother would be enchanted at the match, and Ginnie would be lost to him forever, as she would be all ears and eyes for her husband when she married. He was terrified lest Bertie should propose to her that evening, and vowed to himself he would get her away from him the instant dinner was over. There was a very determined look about Bertie to-night, he thought.

Vivien saw that her companion was restless and resented his glances across the table. However much she disliked to acknowledge it, there was no getting away from the fact that Miss Allerti was delightfully out of the ordinary. The dust from a tired world had not soiled her, and yet her knowledge of its hardships gave her a rare sympathy for one so young. She used her hands freely, in the continental way, to express her words. Vivien was pleased to note this extremely bad form, and that they were

not pretty hands either, but thin and capable, and looked as though they had been used for turning handsprings, so strong and flexible were they. Presently she turned towards Neil and remarked that it was a pity that, with all her beauty, Miss Allerti should affect the theatrical. Although it is hard to know exactly what they mean, this is a criticism empty women often make of their more brilliant neighbors. Neil ignored the remark but was not strong enough to resent it. Indeed, he never liked to put all his eggs in one basket.

After dinner, Ginnie was again the centre of attraction among the ladies. Muriel Van Ebens had a great power of making every one feel at home, and had taken Ginnie to her heart from the moment they met. Her dress was admired and all but Vivien had kind words and glances to bestow on her. When the men came upstairs Neil was the last to enter the room, in time, however, to see Ginnie disappear into the Conservatory with Reggie Grant and Hamilton Fitzmaurice.

“Quite safe with either,” he muttered to himself, and went across the room to join his hostess. It was nearly midnight when the party broke up, and Ginnie was not a little surprised to find that her uncle’s brougham and footman had not returned for them. Her cousin confessed that he had sent the men home, as it was a cruel wet night to keep the horses standing—unusual thoughtfulness on his part. She showed she was annoyed at the liberty he had taken and said in a low tone, pregnant with anger:

“I prefer going home like a lady with my own servants, and I don’t like driving in stray cabs at night, even with you for protection.”

She allowed him to help her in with little grace. Neil followed after her, giving directions to the driver in an undertone. The footman closed the door with some difficulty and the rickety vehicle started. Ginnie huddled herself in one corner and showed distinct temper. Neil was nettled too at her speaking to him in such a way, a manner he was not used to

from women. After all it was nice of him to take her out at all, he reflected, and, propped by this thought, he addressed her with careful sarcasm:

“For one only lately accustomed to driving in broughams you have formed a tenacious habit rather suddenly.”

He was conscious of having expressed himself badly, but it made him furious to see that she was laughing at him, in the dull street-light that hazed through the window. She shrugged her shoulders as she answered:

“Your sarcasm is lost on me, but I do prefer nice things when I can have them, though I have done a long time without them. But I resent your lying to me, and I wish you never to dare to do it again.”

He could not believe his ears, and in her fury she did not see that he was beside himself with jealousy, and that all the devil in him was awake.

“It is my own brougham, and I stupidly supposed I might do as I liked with it.”

“Yes—and I stupidly supposed, when you offered to take me out and bring me home, that you would do it like a gentleman.”

“You think me not a—a—a gentleman?” He was blind with rage and leaned over her, though he dared not touch her. “I have never been told that before.”

“Because nobody has dared to. Now, you look like a villain in a play, distorted and hideous. What an actor you would make! At dinner I looked across the table and thought how handsome you were. How could I——”

“Did you really think of me at dinner?”

“Yes, and the Duke doesn’t like you, and I—I contradicted what he said about you.”

“What did he say about me?” asked Neil.

“He said you would always leave one in a hole, and that he would as soon say it to your face. He said you were not to be relied on, and were a moral coward.”

Neil hung his head; the fire died out of his eyes.

"Doesn't that make you angry? It did me."

He gave a grateful smile.

"No, because I think it is true. One can't help one's own nature."

"Fie, baby, fie! Don't say that. I told him I liked you, but he said you had only seen me on the crest of the wave, and you never looked into the trough. I don't believe it of you, and I told him so. I was quite cold to him afterwards; I rather enjoy a little fight, the making up is so pleasant. By the way, I have grown to like Mr. Grant enormously."

She glanced at Neil out of the corners of her eyes and went on:

"I think one could be very happy with him under certain circumstances. He is good-tempered and not—not jealous or selfish; and we got on rather better than usual. He is coming to tea to-morrow."

"Oh, no he isn't!"

"Oh, yes he is!"

"Oh, no he isn't! I shall run away

with you by to-morrow and make you marry me."

Ginnie was too much of a woman not to be flattered by Neil's jealousy, and in her pleasure the temptation to tease him grew. Her eyes danced with mischief.

"Make me—make me do anything? You make me laugh, that's all you make me do. I have no desire to marry you till I am ninety; then there would not be long to wait in case I had made a mistake."

She curled herself almost into a ball and buried her face in the warm soft collar of her opera cloak. Neil watched her for a moment before he spoke.

"No, not long. But why—why do you try to make me miserable, Ginnie? Can't you see how I am suffering? I would die if you married Reggie Grant. He would never understand you as I do; he has no understanding of women at all."

Ginnie raised her head long enough to say: "Of course, I know you have a great deal, Neil," with a roguishness that maddened him and resumed her former

position. His voice grew husky as he continued to plead with her.

“I am my own worst enemy, and nobody cares for me long. I cannot make friends without the greatest difficulty, and there is some hideous kink in my nature that always draws away the prize from me. Ginnie, Ginnie, believe me, if you turn your back on me, I can’t live, I can’t live! I should go mad—or—or—Ginnie, I never knew a really good woman before; I mean a woman who is good and who is attractive enough to be bad. You could save my soul, what little I have, if you would only promise to marry me. Let me just worship you, and in time, I think, I could grow worthy of your love.”

He had touched on her goodness, the great ideal of her life—and her usefulness. She was only a little over seventeen, and she fell into the trap, the trap that men of his kind prepare so cleverly.

A long silence ensued. Her animal spirits slowly died away. She was thinking and did not notice where they were going, out toward Putney. Suddenly

the cab stopped in front of an apartment house. Neil jumped out and spoke to the driver. Then he held the door open for Ginnie and looked into her eyes. The words he had meant to say froze on his lips. Then, with sudden change of purpose, he stepped in and told the man to drive as fast as he could to Everett House.

"What did you do that for?" she asked innocently.

"Will you hate me if I tell you?"

"Not if you tell me the truth."

"I was going to take you to a clergyman here and make you marry me."

"What nonsense!"

"But I—I am only a slave at your feet!"

"Quite the proper place for you; and a charming new sensation, isn't it?"

Neil shrank away from her. He was afraid he would try to kiss her and spoil everything.

"Don't tempt me too much, don't tempt me, for God's sake!" he cried, putting his hands over his eyes. "O

Ginnie, I love you so madly, passionately, I cannot bear the thought that one of these other men should get you, however much more worthy they could be! I beg of you, promise to marry me! Let me go home and tell my mother you will marry me next month."

"Neil, Neil, she would never allow it. She would hate me for taking advantage of all her kindness and then not doing what was best for your happiness. It would be so ungrateful of me."

"Ginnie, don't talk like an angel, for you are a woman, every inch of you. Let me talk to Mother. With your love and help I could reach any heights, whereas, mated to some vegetable, I could make nothing of my life. I need you—so dreadfully. I will promise not to kiss you—if you ask it."

She leaned forward in the dim light, her crimson lips trembled.

"I promise to marry you, Neil—and I would like to kiss you."

CHAPTER XII.

HAMILTON FITZMAURICE and the Duke of Grantley remained with Muriel after the other guests had gone. Fitzmaurice threw himself down on the sofa beside his hostess and, stretching himself, said gaily:

“Now is the time to talk about the departed guests, and show ourselves perfect gentlemen by abusing them. I will begin, seeing that Muriel is shy about it. Firstly, Neil grows more insufferable every day, and I hope he marries Vivien Nelson. He deserves an awful fate like that, and Vivien certainly deserves him. She is worn out with her arduous pursuit. I told her to-night that I was thankful I was only a poor Irishman, for fear she might marry me in spite of myself. Honestly (I am so easily led), I should be terrified for my life.”

“Hamilton, how could you say such

an awful thing to a girl? Wasn't she angry?"

"Rather! mad as a hornet, and got up and left me. Just what I wanted. She had joined me of her own sweet will. By the way, I like the way you have done your room over. The grey watered silk walls are a most becoming background. I was conscious of looking my best all the evening. It gives one such poise."

They laughed, and Bertie told him to keep quiet, adding that he too liked her drawing-room. It was very simple; grey and white walls with mauve and white flowers, a few objects d'art, two huge glass doors that opened into the conservatory at the end, where a fountain played musically over marble lovers, and goldfish splashed. Muriel had a great love for her home, and the atmosphere of her content was strong in it, and their admiration of it pleased her.

Hamilton was not to be suppressed. "I can't think what Bertie and I should do if we lost this home, by your marry-

ing some awful man who didn't care about our being here nearly every day and for all stray meals. The main object of my life is to prevent your marrying, Muriel. I shall lie to you about the man, and if I catch him contemplating you I'll tell him you drink, gamble and flirt, and every horrible thing I can think of to stop it."

"If he cared for Muriel, and was put off by anything you or any one else said about her, he wouldn't be worth calling a man,—and a good riddance for Muriel," observed Grantley very seriously.

"You talk just like a man in a novel,—a four volume novel, too! 'Pon my word, I feel as though I were studying diction when I hear you. But in spite of all your faults I will borrow money from you still. I never go back on a tried, true friend. Now I'm going to leave you and Muriel alone. I have entertained you long enough, and you have not made the slightest effort to entertain me. Good-night!" Ham-

ilton rose, and Bertie and Muriel both followed him to the hall.

“Good-night, old chap. I have a good deal to talk to Muriel about, and shall stay on half an hour. Drop in to-morrow morning on your way to the Turf. I have just got some mezzotints and would like to know what you think of them before I decide to keep them. They were sent on approval. Lowenstein is after them too, I believe. He got two of them before me.”

“Is it true, Hamilton, that you are going to marry Miss Lowenstein? Every one tells me it is, and that she is madly in love with you?” Muriel asked, laying her hand affectionately on Hamilton’s shoulder.

“It is not true. She must wait for some of the French nobility.”

“Good-night again,” and he was gone.

“Come into the conservatory, Bertie. I enjoyed my party enormously, but want a quiet talk with you about all sorts of things. First, before we settle down to talk, I am going to make you

climb to the top of the house with me, to the floor above my bedroom. I was unpacking some old boxes and rolls yesterday, and found a beautiful piece of tapestry; I think it old, but want to know something about it, and know you can tell me, as you have such divine tapestries, and are such an authority. Lowenstein tells me you know more about tapestries than any man in England." She led the way through the hall and up the narrow staircase.

When they had gone up two flights of stairs, Bertie stopped suddenly, putting his finger to his lips. The brilliant lights rendered the silence in the deserted hall more appalling to Muriel's alarmed senses. Womanlike, she did not care to see what horror might be stalking there so long as it did not see her. She clung to Bertie's arm, with difficulty repressing her gasping breath and desire to run. Her mind intent on what she was going to show him, she had not heard the very faint sound that had caught her companion's ear,

or, as he almost thought, only his imagination. He stepped carefully on tip-toe to the edge of the rail and looked over into the deep spaces below. From Muriel's bedroom door was stealing noiselessly and swiftly a crouching man, carrying with him a heavy bag, probably filled with the contents of her jewel-case. He had undoubtedly heard the two pass unsuspectingly upstairs, and imagined he might depart in safety if he did so immediately. Looking up he saw Bertie leaning over the banisters with an expression of the liveliest interest. The same thought immediately struck them both. But the thief had the lead of a full flight of stairs with a good chance of keeping it if he did not hesitate. Fully expecting pursuit, and confident that he would win out with his "swag," he continued his flight and reached the ground floor. To gain the front door and get out into the street, he must pass just under where Bertie was still looking over the rail. This the latter had foreseen and made up his

mind what he should do. As the intruder ran along the hall, Bertie watched and calculated and, suddenly springing over the rail, dropped with his legs apart on the wretched man's shoulders just as he reached the point directly below him, bringing him down on the marbled floor with such force that he was badly crushed, and too much hurt to struggle. Muriel, half sick with fright and horror at seeing her protector shoot down through the air past those flights of stairs, had summoned all her presence of mind and rung for the footman. Then she ran downstairs.

The police were called, and in half an hour the house was quiet again. Bertie adjusted his cravat, and smoothing his hair with his hand said to Muriel: "Come, let us go up to the tapestries."

Muriel gave a faint smile. "Really, I couldn't tell a tapestry from a cotton print to-night. I have had such a shock and you can't think how grateful I am to you. I think I would rather—just go

to bed, and I shall make my maid sleep on the sofa in my room."

Bertie laughed. "Quite a varied evening, wasn't it? I'm glad we saved the jewels. I will look at your tapestries to-morrow at tea-time if I may. Don't think about all this, I beg of you. You look quite white."

"But see, Bertie, you have hurt your hand. You can't move it, and it is bleeding."

"Nonsense. I'll put on my coat and go home and have it attended to. Go directly upstairs. Syms will see that I get out without taking the spoons."

He had turned very pale, but stood and watched Muriel obey him. She walked slowly up the stair while Syms whistled for a hansom.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON reaching home Ginnie went immediately to her room, while Neil went up to his mother's sitting-room, where he expected she would be waiting for him. She was reading under the glow of a student's lamp, with papers and periodicals strewn on the table beside her. Neil's excited appearance disturbed her.

"Was it an amusing party?" she asked, laying down her book.

Neil shrugged his shoulders and seated himself in a deep chair opposite her.

"Mother, I cannot wait to tell you,—and I don't wish any arguments—Ginnie will become my wife next month."

Lady Frost raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

"Isn't this very—very sudden? Of course, you are your own master, and I am prepared to welcome as my daughter any woman you choose to bring to our

house as your wife, and will love and cherish her. But Ginnie seems hardly a wife for you to choose unless under some great excitement. However, you don't wish to discuss it to-night."

She turned down the lamp and put it out, so that only the soft side-lights on the wall lit the room, for the glare of the lamps nearly always made her son irritable.

"I have been under a tremendous nervous strain. It is a relief to have it all settled," said Neil wearily.

Lady Frost tactfully appeared to change the subject.

"I had tea with Lady Barr this afternoon, and we talked much of your future and past."

"I can imagine what a fascinating afternoon it must have been for you both," he observed ironically.

"Yes it was. She is a very clever woman and knows you thoroughly. But it pained me to hear that you had compromised Vivien, and that she was afraid your path would not be strewn with

roses if you fail to marry her. There are certain things one expects from gentlemen,—unwritten laws, and—”

“But how the devil have I compromised Vivien? Besides, she always bores me, and she knows it as well as anybody else.”

“She is madly in love with you. It is pitiful that her young life should be—be—”

“Nearly over,” suggested Neil.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, she can’t die very young, whatever happens now.”

“I don’t mean die. I mean worse than death, blighted. I feel myself much to blame, as I encouraged the world to expect you both to marry ultimately, and I always showed Vivien my approval; and now, of course, to feel she was only useful to you as an escape from marrying Muriel Van Ebens, it does seem hard on the girl.”

“It does indeed.” His tone was relentless, and he lit another cigarette.

“I would be the last person in the

world to interfere with your decision; I only want you to weigh it." Neither spoke for a few minutes.

"You, of course, have considered the fact that you know nothing about her birth or early influences."

"On the contrary, I know all. Her mother was Allerti's mistress, to put the whole thing in a nutshell. She told me a long rigmarole; I only heard half of it, as I was using all my strength of mind to keep from taking her in my arms and kissing her. I never saw a girl with so much latent vitality."

"What is that you say?" his mother asked, but controlling her amazement, quickly went on, "Then you feel her power most when you are with her?"

"Rather! the little witch! and it makes me wild to see her talk to other men. She has been so hard to—to impress in any way, too—but now, thank Heaven, I shall possess her soon. She is much younger than I am, and will not lose her looks till I am tottering with old age and virtue."

"I don't agree with you about that. Her type fades very quickly. She is emotional, and has theories and ideas; nothing ages a woman so much; and she will get very skinny in time."

"Skinny? Don't, mother! you know I hate bones so."

"You may loathe bones, but hers are very lightly covered. She moves like a ballet-dancer, and the very lightness and grace which you admire is most ephemeral. It means bones and yellow wrinkles. Of course, Neil, you would not mind being laughed at?" She had hit his sore point.

"Laughed at?" He turned, frightened.

"Yes. You would not mind being laughed at, as long as we are talking plainly."

"On the contrary, I should very much mind being laughed at; what reason would there be, pray?"

"Why, the fact that you had tumbled a prey to this little schemer, who in cold blood has set her cap for you. She

naturally likes her house and home. I quite understand it, and in my own heart—" (here his mother touched the spot where that organ should repose unobserved) "in my own heart, I say, I can't blame her. But it has been the talk of London; and, of course, there is always something a little undignified and ludicrous about a man being married in spite of himself."

Neil coughed, as if thereby to add to his dignity, and rose from his seat.

"Of course there is. But I can't see it—that she has tried—"

"O, Neil! really you are childish! She is very charming, and her studied indifference has been much to be admired; her refusal of Reggie Grant and then appealing to you, and all the rest. You have told me but little. But, Neil, marry her by all means, and you have my blessing; but know what you are doing. Know that people will pitch into you on all sides, and Vivien's friends naturally would not receive you. It will break your father's heart; I don't count

myself at all, for your will is mine. And then think of her disreputable parentage, and her father, who might undertake to make his home with you; ask her forgiveness—and she is the sort of person who would forgive anybody anything—come now, you must acknowledge that!”

“Yes, I think she would—”

“And O, how funny it would be to think of you—you of all men—being caught by a penniless cousin, who fascinated you with her novelty; who has a bad temper, a strong will, a very unconventional and difficult character, and who probably, after a few years of our world, would be homesick for the Bohemians she had been used to in her childhood—‘the unkempt genii’ among whom she really belongs! Why, one sees it in every look and gesture of the child. I am not trying to stop you, Neil, doing anything that you decide is best; but before it is too late, think of it on all sides, particularly the fact that you are making yourself ridiculous.”

"But it is too late, Mother, even if I am making myself ridiculous."

A great lump choked him in his throat. "Ridiculous!" How her words burned him! He was consumed with an unadulterated fear, fear of the world's laughter. His passion, his love, his manhood dwindled away before it. Fear had clutched at his throat, was written on his countenance, was tempting him to become its victim. Lady Frost saw it, and tried not to look triumphant. Presently she said:

"Will you trust me to help you?"

It might have been taken in several ways. He took it in the way she had hoped for.

"What could you do?"

"Leave it to me, Neil, and I will do to-morrow all that is possible to save you." She left the room and only turned back once to see him bury his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was the day after Grantley had leapt over the rails and caught Muriel's burglar, and his exploit was on everyone's tongue. Hamilton Fitzmaurice had received a note at the club from Lowenstein asking him to call between six and seven. Perhaps it was about the company they were floating together, and he rushed off in a hansom, calling to the driver to go as fast as he could, nearly falling headlong out, and paying double what he owed him in his joy. He would be a rich man soon anyway, so what did an extra shilling matter.

Mr. Lowenstein's house on Berkeley Square had much too much gold and electric light about it. Mr. Lowenstein himself suffered from too much money. He was waiting to receive his guest, looking like a tailor's advertisement in check trousers and frock coat, and very

shiny heavily pricked patent leather shoes. His small eyes and large nose were red, his lips were of a bluish tint, and the rest of his countenance yellow. The sharp look he had worn during their last meeting had gone and he seemed much agitated.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Fitzmaurice." He extended his damp little hand to his visitor with anxious heartiness. "Be seated, sir. I appreciate your coming at once. I have had a good deal of worry lately, and I felt sure that by talking to you things might be smoothed out."

"Indeed, don't mention it. Perhaps I guess your anxiety. I was delighted to be sent for," returned Hamilton eagerly.

"You are very good, very kind, young man, and give me courage to come to the point quickly, which perhaps you have indeed guessed. Forgive me if I am awkward. I believe I am right in surmising you have small means upon which to keep up your exalted position?"

Hamilton coughed to be sure he had

not died of joy. There could be no doubt Lowenstein meant to make him his heir or something comfortable.

Hamilton nodded to express the truth of his statements, and a radiant smile swept over his countenance, which seemed to have the effect of putting his host more at his ease. He moved closer to Hamilton and caught him by the lapel of his coat, which by the way had not yet been paid for.

“My poor little Rachel, as you know, has no mother.”

“I did not know you had two children,” said his visitor sympathetically, as Lowenstein paused and was evidently expecting some observation.

“No, no, I only have one, but I always think of her as a little girl, as she was when her mother died.”

“O, pardon me! Pray continue, Mr. Lowenstein. Yes, I understand.”

“If she had a mother all these things would be managed so differently for her; you know the ladies have such a knack with them!”

"They have indeed," said Hamilton, trembling from head to foot.

"What I want to say, Mr. Fitzmaurice, is, that my Rachel has hardly any friends. She has been out in society very little, only about a year, as you know."

"How about the friends in Soho?" thought Hamilton, but with unusual wisdom he kept quiet.

Lowenstein rubbed his hands nervously, and his voice became more caressing, more alarming to Hamilton.

"Well, my little Rachel has been taken sick, very sick. She don't care no more for society, or her clothes, or her pearls—hardly even for her papa. She cares only for you; and the doctor, who is the most expensive in London, told me in the strictest confidence that she will only be well if she marries you."

Poor Hamilton's hands gripped the arms of his chair and his forehead twisted itself into endless wrinkles and puckers. It was an awful moment for him. Mr. Lowenstein went on, his voice trembling with emotion:

“My poor little Rachel has her heart set on you. Now I know plenty of women in your own class of life that would be glad to marry you.” Here Hamilton felt his chest swell, but he wondered who had been fooling Lowenstein.

“As I remarked, plenty of prettier faces. But you know the Jews are very devoted wives and mothers.

“I know, O yes, I know!” groaned Hamilton.

“If you like her enough to marry her I will settle an enormous fortune on you, such as no prince in Europe has, and you shall have this house.” This announcement was accompanied by a flourish of his left hand towards the hideously decorated walls. “You and your children will inherit my entire fortune at my death. The doctors say I shall not be long-lived. I eat too much. I only tell you this so you know what is coming to you.”

“I see,” said Hamilton gravely, much moved by the pathos of the Jew’s plea for his daughter’s happiness.

"If you wish, I will take you up now to see her." Lowenstein went quickly toward the door, alive to Hamilton's sympathy. "She is lying on a sofa in her sitting-room, exhausted from crying."

Hamilton did not feel that he could face little Rachel after crying. Lovely women were bad enough after that, but ugly ones!

"Ahem! Mr. Lowenstein, it is a matter that requires some thought. I am deeply flattered that your daughter has valued my—a—friendship, so highly. There are some little things, however, that I think you and she should know before deciding that you really wish me for a member of your family. No gentleman should pretend to love a woman he does not."

"I quite understand," put in Lowenstein promptly, "that you can as yet only feel for my little Rachel as an acquaintance."

"I have been in love with a married woman since I was a boy. She is a widow now."

Lowenstein's mouth drooped. "Ah! and she naturally wishes to marry you?"

"Strange as it may seem she cares nothing about me in that way. But I have also many debts."

"How many?" interrupted Lowenstein, looking less dreamy.

"About a thousand pounds."

"A good many for a young man who cannot work. But we could fix those up easily."

"How do you mean fix them up?"

"I mean clear them off."

"You are most kind. Believe me, I appreciate it. But, as a gentleman, I could not entertain the idea of marrying your daughter without being perfectly candid with you."

"Yes, Mr, Fitzmaurice, whatever else people may think of you, they must acknowledge you are born and bred a gentleman."

Hamilton glanced up to see if he meant to be funny, but was convinced that his humor was unconscious. He rose and suggested that as it was growing late he

would go home and return to-morrow at the same hour and give him his answer.

He did not call a cab but walked down Bruton Street. His head hung and he felt an old man. His six pretty sisters in Ireland that never got more than two weeks a year of gaiety in Dublin seemed to line up before him. Would Rachel be good to them? he wondered. He was the only brother. His mother led a very dreary life in the country trying to make the farm pay, and it never did. He loved her very much, but not enough to live in Ireland with her. There were endless good fellows he could do a good turn to in London. He was naturally generous and thoughtful of others without the wherewithal to indulge his kindness of heart. But he had always had such a contempt for the Englishmen who had gone to America to marry heiresses. He had always poked fun at the Lowensteins; what would people think of him, if in the end he married the Jewess from Soho? He would be more merciful in the future to men who had unattractive wives.

Did she really care for him? he then wondered. Or did she only want to know his friends? None of them would ever snatch her from him after they were married however, of that he was quite sure. Could he ever break her of the jewel habit?

She certainly was the image of her father, but did she have a warm heart, though? If she did it made up for a great deal. There were not so many people who had kind hearts. It was a trifle in her favor. Perhaps her girlhood friends in Soho were not such desirable friends after all; in every class of the social world youth makes friends of which later years and circumstances deprive us.

CHAPTER XV.

THE following morning Ginnie received with her breakfast a note from Neil.

“Darling Ginnie, I am off to the country to attend a meeting, and may be gone for several days. It is hard to leave you, but I know you well enough to know you are the last person in the world to ask me to forswear duty for pleasure, so *au revoir*. My mother was most sympathetic and sensible. I leave her to your tender care during my absence. Yours ever, Neil.”

It was not a letter to blister with its passion the object of his affection. Still, it was Ginnie's first love-letter. She tucked it under her pillow full of faith and joy. She had another message from Lady Frost to come to her boudoir at half-past ten.

Lady Frost awaited her, looking very aristocratic and handsome swathed in a

lace matinee and reading the morning paper, with her feet resting on a velvet stool near the fire. Ginnie stood on the threshold longing to embrace her, but something in the beautiful face chilled her, and yet she looked so dreadfully like Neil.

"Come in, my dear, and draw your chair up beside me. It is so very damp this morning that I think I shall not go out. I thought we would have a little talk. I fear I have not given you all the time I should have since you have lived with us, but my life seems so frightfully busy with one thing and another that you and I have not had a chance to know each other as well as we should have done."

Her voice was musical and low. Ginnie felt touched by her kindness.

"Indeed, Aunt Ruth, I can never be grateful enough to you and Uncle for all you have done for me. I hardly know how I can ever show it, and—and—" her voice broke. Hardly knowing what to say, she wisely kept quiet.

"Your mother's life was—er—er—most unfortunate to say the least?"

“Most tragic, poor Mother! She was so afraid Uncle would know her shame, and I have always been so terrified lest my father would come here just to annoy you and Uncle. He hates you both. That is why I was afraid to marry Neil, and at first refused him. But no—I could not refuse him twice.” Ginnie leaned forward, clasping her knees, and gazed into the fire with a sad little smile.

“So you did at first refuse him?” The tone of Lady Frost’s question showed that she could hardly believe her ears.

“Yes, I thought he had told you everything, but he will. About Mother having been on the stage and my singing in the streets, and the great Italian actress who helped us so much. You could not help loving Mme. R. O, Aunt Ruth, I wish you could meet her!”

Lady Frost shuddered at the thought. What strange creature had she harbored in her respectable home?

“We would probably not be as congenial as you think, my dear. Professional people have never come into my

life at all, and I have all the friends and more than I can see already."

Ginnie could not understand any one not wanting to meet Mme. R. However, she went on: "I am used to hard work, but I could not marry a man I did not love."

"You could not marry Reggie Grant?"

"No, no!"

"And you love Neil?"

"I love him, and I feel that he—he loves my soul. Through age, misery, sickness or death, he would be faithful to me."

To very hard women pathos and humor are impossible to separate; in Ginnie's little speech, filled with hope and confidence, Lady Frost saw only humor, and her smile of appreciation hurt.

"You allow poor Neil no humanity at all, such as one should allow ordinary manhood."

"The man I love is above ordinary manhood or I could not love him." She spoke with a child's magnificent pride.

“And what, Georgina, would you renounce for him?”

“Everything, anything! Believe me, I am as ambitious for his happiness as you are.”

“Yet you acknowledge yourself the child of disgrace!” The acute shadow of suffering that spread over poor Ginnie’s face was lost on Lady Frost, who only drew herself up in all her mighty virtue of circumstance and said rigidly:

“It is most painful for me to do my duty in this matter, and tell you that I see only one course open to you if you wish to do right.”

“I do. I do wish to do what is right. Tell me, I beg you.”

Lady Frost cleared her throat and began:

“Of course, I must not be hard on you, as you have not had many advantages of early training; but forgive me, dear, if I wound you. It was deceitful of you to harbour yourself here among us, without letting us know the—the particulars of your birth. Associating

with young girls and all, as you were bound to do here. Surely you could not expect their mothers would permit it had they known what you were, and you could hardly expect me, knowing it, to keep you here, at the risk of it getting to my poor dear husband's ears, or your father turning up and making a scene. Your mother would want to spare her brother. It would kill him."

"Oh, my poor mother! she never meant to hurt me. She made me promise never to tell Uncle her misery. I felt I had to tell Neil."

"In that you were quite right. But you should have told me sooner. Sad as it all is, you must pay the penalty of your mother's sin. You have not the right to be among decent people."

Poor little Ginnie groaned aloud and clasped her hands convulsively, while her aunt went on with increasing courage.

"And you owe it to us to go away somewhere, among people of your own kind, and look back later on this as

only an incident in your life. Better let your uncle think you ran away ungratefully than that you should bring disgrace to us all by marrying Neil."

Ginnie sank on her knees in front of her aunt, her head bowed in misery, and clutched the hem of her dress in her trembling hands.

"Tell me what to do before I go mad. Anything, and I will do it. I did not realize before—I was not fit to be among decent people. I only tried to do what I believed right. I don't seem to know right from wrong."

Lady Frost quickly slipped the long diamond chain from off her own neck over Ginnie's head; to the end of it was attached a small gold purse heavy with sovereigns.

"Take this, with my blessing. Leave the house, I beg you, this morning; go to France or Italy, and start your life afresh under an assumed name. I ask you only to promise me never again to claim relationship with us and never to say I advised you. It has been most

difficult for me, and might be misconstrued. People will soon learn you have run away, and infer that you were bored with your conventional life here, and a thousand harmless stories will be circulated. You must not mind, but live your own life, free from us all. You have youth, beauty and intelligence; many girls with fewer advantages have done much. Take old Felicia with you. You surely have some friends somewhere; I think you mentioned some actress. You must do this to shield your uncle from pain. You have always told me you would lay down your life for him."

Lady Frost knew the effect her words were having; she gently drew back her rustling skirts and left the room.

Ginnie was still kneeling, the gems sparkling on her breast, when her uncle entered. He did not notice her distress as she rose to greet him.

"Ah, my dear, you have been searching for something? I fear my old eyes are too useless to be of much service to you. What have you dropped?"

He put his arm tenderly about her waist.

"Will you be ready to take me for a little walk at noon. I want a little air and cheer before luncheon. We can feed the sparrows. That gives you nearly an hour to prink first."

She only hung her head; her lips were paralyzed.

"Lost your tongue, little girl, eh? And searching for it in the Turkish pattern. Or is the gay world entangling you so that you have no more time for your poor old uncle?"

She flung her arms about his neck, and, pressing her fresh face close to his withered cheek, whispered passionately:

"Dearest, dearest, it is you I love more than all else in the world."

"Tut, tut, you are choking me! I can't follow your spiritual flights. Be ready to lead me out of the front door at twelve."

Ginnie had gone before he had finished.

At the stroke of the clock the footman

handed Lord Frost his hat and cane. His lordship was evidently annoyed at being kept waiting, and asked the servant where Miss Allerti was.

“She went out in a cab with her maid about twenty minutes ago, my lord.”

He shrugged his gaunt shoulders and handed back the things to his servant.

“I shall not go out after all to-day,” he said aloud, and to himself murmured: “What should I expect? Young blood seeks young blood,” and he fumbled his way back to the library.

CHAPTER XVI.

ABOUT two weeks after Ginnie's disappearance from London, Lady Barr gave an evening party, half political, half vaudeville, but its real use was to announce Neil's engagement to Vivien Nelson. Lord Barr looked particularly bored. He always did at his own parties, and had a distrait expression which arose from the anxiety of feeling obliged to pay for it some day. The fat lady, with the banjo, "from the States," was sure to be expensive, because she had sung before the King, and everybody wanted her. He couldn't understand why his wife had engaged her anyway. Hardly any one understood the "darkie dialect," and the woman herself was distinctly plain, although she did not seem to be conscious of it, carrying herself with an assurance that was incomprehensible to him.

A pretty Spanish dancer made the sensation of the evening. He had no objection to running into debt for this whirl of color and grace, yellow and black tassels, with an impudent turned-up nose and masses of uncombed black hair caught up insecurely with a huge amber comb and a red rose. Soon it all came down, and fell over her neck and shoulders, and the rose to the floor. She stooped and picked it up, pressing it passionately to her lips, while her naughty black eyes scanned the audience, seeking who to throw it to. She struck Neil with it full in the face, and every one laughed and clapped. The mandolins and guitars played louder and faster, and La Bella Doloria, tossing her head and swaying her body with all the fury and intoxicating suggestiveness of the Spanish school of dancing, crossed to where Neil stood, dazed and scarlet, and stopping short in front of him, called out in her strong Spanish accent: "Don't bother me, shoo-fly! you is engaged jus' now!"

Vivien was annoyed, and would have been more so had she not been the recipient of effusive congratulations all evening and much polite flattery. She looked distinctly relieved now that everything was settled.

Lady Barr and Vivien's stuttering old uncle were talking together. She listened to Neil's virtues retailed with difficulty. This took surprisingly long, and he ended by saying, with the ghost of a twinkle in his off eye:

"He is well-connected, glittering with gold, and certainly understands the ladies, eh?"

A new tiara reposed in Lady Barr's curls. It had been much commented on. She turned to Hamilton Fitzmaurice, who was leaning against the door, looking very depressed, with Mr. and Miss Lowenstein respectively flanking him, wreathed in smiles.

"I see you looking at my new tiara, Hamilton. Isn't it lovely, as the Yankees say?" She touched it fondly.

"Where did you get it? There aren't

many tiaras flying around these hard times," he sighed.

"Through the death of a relation—a distant cousin of my sister's brother-in-law—they lived in Kent. Did you ever hear of anything so unusual?"

"One can hardly believe it. Is it real?"

"Real! How dare you suggest such a thing! As if I would wear imitation things!"

"Then why don't you wear black for him, or her?"

Lady Barr looked down at her sapphire velvet and lace gown, and in a tone of horror repeated, "black! black!" until she could collect her wits to add:

"Naturally it was my instinct to wear black. I simply longed to put it on, but it was by special request I did not. He was such an odd creature—"

"Must have been," muttered Hamilton in an undertone.

"Fearfully prejudiced against black, and mourning, and all that sort of thing, and insisted that I should go on

leading my own regular or irregular life, as you may choose to call it. Wasn't it angelic of him to leave it to poor me? You look quite ill, my dear boy. What is the matter? Are you in love?"

Hamilton shuddered. "I am bored at hearing every one pitch into Lady Frost's niece. London society is so cruel." And he turned from his hostess to where Muriel and Grantley stood talking with Lady Frost.

"More than this I cannot tell you," she was saying.

Muriel had been trying her best to stem the tide of abuse before it washed away all the pleasant memories the girl had left behind her in London. She said gently to Lady Frost:

"But granting everything you say is true, I do not think it was unnatural that Miss Allerti should wish the whole thing kept secret, and I can't think her deceitful or vicious not to have it proclaimed on the house-tops that she was an illegitimate child."

Grantley walked away disgusted, giv-

ing place to Mrs. Nelson, who was now Lady Barr's shadow. Lady Frost continued, with all the fervor she would use canvassing at an election:

"Such ingratitude, slyness, selfishness! Indeed, I would rather have seen Neil dead than married to Ginnie, yet the poor boy fell into the trap she so cleverly laid for him. She literally forced him to propose to her."

"How?" asked Muriel with the slightest curve to her soft lips.

"Ah, that I can't tell!" said Lady Frost truthfully. "Poor Neil was in an awful state the night she made him do it. After your dinner, Muriel, she drove him to the ends of London, and worked on his feelings to such a degree—but I really cannot tell more."

"Indeed," put in Mrs. Nelson feelingly, "I know what you must have gone through. I too have suffered in all Neil's wanderings. I was so anxious for my dear Vivien all the time that girl was with you, never knowing what might happen. And my dear child

loved him through it all. She never wavered from the main object of her life. Isn't it really beautiful?"

Lady Frost hastened to assure her that it was. By this time Lady Barr had joined the little group, and from what she overheard guessed they were busy throwing stones at the departed Ginnie. She said with an air of finality:

"Of course the most contemptible thing of all was the way she left, without a word to Neil or Lord Frost, to whom she owed exerything. Bored with a respectable life, I suppose."

"What, no good-byes!" cried Muriel, astonished, though only half credulous. "Why, I thought her so devoted to her uncle. Poor child, the circumstances of her birth were a tragedy for which her enemies could only pity her."

She glanced at Vivien, who had just joined her mother.

"Surely a girl who sings in the streets and haunts low theatres is not a fit companion for young girls brought up as I was," observed that virtuous young person.

“Perhaps, like the birds, she sang because she was hungry. We can’t judge.”

“Hungry? Nonsense!” retorted Vivien, who had never felt anything except from having eaten too much. “You really are too romantic!”

Romantic was not what Muriel was trying to appear. She only wanted a little justice. She could not believe all the gossip about Ginnie, and she had seen social currents in London suddenly change their course before, sweeping their prey into the sea of oblivion. That stream is very strong if started in a powerful quarter, and who is brave enough to struggle against it, and how few are strong enough to rise above it!

Lady Frost was beginning to feel the intoxication of her power, and enjoyed seeing Ginnie’s head go under, and resented Muriel’s attempts at holding it up. She went on coldly:

“The shock has nearly killed my poor husband, who wasted so much affection on her and her mother. And poor Neil as well. Of course he was

not really the least in love with her, and realized in a few days that he was well out of it; but it was a shameful way for her to treat him. Her temper, of course, was quite impossible. I wouldn't, you know, say anything to take away a young girl's character, and I grant you she had great charm. But she was not the sort of person that we mothers wish to have associating with our daughters, do we, Mrs. Nelson?"

Muriel moved away. She was fond of Ginnie, and was shocked at their heartlessness. She too had loved this worthless man, and in the sleepless nights it had cost her she had developed heart and womanhood. Some women have this rare faculty of extracting good from evil. She was struggling now for the real things of life which she had missed before, and her sincere desire was to be of use and to make others happy, an ambition that no one had ever taught her to think glorious. Neil never understood his own effect on her character, and was even disappointed to find her resolution to be a

better woman after her husband's death was genuine. His pride was hurt, for he felt her congratulations were sincere, and that she really rejoiced for the dull bride to be. However, he had thought more than once of Muriel's odd nature and decided that it was too complicated to bother about.

And so Ginnie's departure was as hasty and forlorn as her appearance in London had been unexpected and brilliant. All her soul and energy had been turned into one channel, her desire to shield her uncle from pain and forget her aching spirit in some hard work. There seemed nothing but the stage open to her; the stage that enables broken and contrite hearts to raise their hopes and ambitions; the great stage where the sad go to forget and laugh, or cry for misfortune other than their own, where the thinkers go to learn and enjoy, where the dull go to be educated and the *blasé* to criticize.

Poor struggling actress, before you climb up behind those footlights, bear in mind what you must have in your heart,

“to warn, to comfort, and command.” You must laugh and cry night after night. You must see the shadows grow under your eyes and the lines harden in your face, hiding what you can with paint and powder; for as you are moved so must you be able to move hundreds. You must rack yourself with emotions and foster all your nerves and sympathies, and as the failures drift away before you, steel yourself to a determination for success; and when it is too late for you to enjoy and when you are worn out and used up, your reward comes. The public forgets all the evil said of your name and cares naught about your past. The doors of the highest are thrown open to you, and the purest of children cherish your photograph or a smile, and you can do no harm because you are great.

Ginnie knew this, having the temperament that could understand. She had read it all across the footlights, and she turned towards Paris and the stage as to heaven, believing she had done her duty. Which of us has not suffered through another’s standard of right and wrong?

PART II

THE SEARCH

CHAPTER I.

“**N**O, no, no, you horrid reporter, don't you ask me again my impressions of America!”

Mme. R., the famous French tragedienne, and Signorina Ginna, had just arrived at the Waldorf in New York, more dead than alive after their struggles with reporters on the docks, from whose assault their two managers combined could not protect them.

“But I'm not a reporter,” expostulated the little man. “I'm Mr. Bernard, to whom you wrote from Paris that you were coming, and who has made a little pile for you on the Stock Exchange since we dined together last spring.”

Mr. Bernard rattled some change in his pocket with his left hand as he spoke. Mme. R.'s face brightened.

“How could I forget you, *cher ami*? Only because the reporters have driven me clean off my head and I feel just ready

to fight. I was weary and 'am refreshed. Ginnie, Piccina, *guardate!*”

Enthralled by the gold and noise of the Waldorf corridor, her companion, a woman of about thirty-five, had not noticed that Mme. R. was being accosted. Instantly she recognized Mr. Bernard and, turning, she extended her hand to him with a radiant smile that made him feel at once she had been searching for him in the crowd. She spoke almost like an English woman; only the voice showed blood of the south. It was excitable and pitched rather high, but full of music. Like many a great actress she did not in the least suggest the stage. Her face was colorless, and her clothes dark and rich.

Mme. R. was over sixty and making her last appearance in New York before retiring from the stage. She had been much feted in Europe, though she had never seen England, saying she disliked the people. The “*On dit*” was that she had thrown away her heart in her youth on an ungrateful Englishman. Be this as it may she was anxious to see

America, and after much persuasion and some financial inducement, both had decided to come to New York. For fifteen years these two had shared a lovely home in Paris. They were not rivals; youth and age cannot be. The younger woman was a comedienne and seldom played tragedy, while Mme. R. never played in anything else. Mme. R. was a thorough woman of the world, though no one knew how or where she was born. Her career dated from the sensation she had made one season at the Français, in Paris. And she soon became the fashion, made herself difficult of access, and so remained a stage queen, whom all distinguished people who came to Paris sought to meet. She was always "*au courant*" with the topics of the day, besides being well acquainted with her literary and artistic world. A bit of a snob, perhaps, but never a toady, even if she did like smoking royal cigarettes and opening notes with coronets. Her friends called her an angel to befriend an illegitimate Italian child of seventeen without

a penny or a relation in the world, just because she had known her mother in days when she was happy. Her enemies said she would never have befriended the girl had she not felt the genius within her, and that she would do her credit in the end. Her friends said she gave all her money to the poor; her enemies that it would be better if she paid her bills. Her friends said that all the great brains of the day were at her feet; her enemies that she would not waste ten minutes unless on a millionaire, royalty or genius.

Ginnie, or La Ginna, as she now called herself, had grown worldly after much careful training. She wasted no talents and cast no pearls before swine. She graciously accepted all the devotion laid at her feet as her right and always chose her company. She went to the suppers and luncheons given for her only when it pleased her, and the priceless furs and jewels sent to her as souvenirs were all accepted in such a way that the giver only felt honored. Now, it was Mr. Bernard who had fallen a victim to her charms when

in Paris during the past spring, while his wife had been indulging in nervous prostration for the first time she could afford it. The faculty was hers of drawing from men that which they knew most about; with Bernard it was stocks and speculations. So she learned what she could and he speculated for her, and could hardly tear himself away from Paris until she promised to follow him to America in the winter with Mme. R., a fortune assured to them both. They did not need it, but were not going to throw such a chance away, and as La Ginna never wore stockings that cost less than twenty dollars a pair and could not sit in a room without orchids, they found no difficulty in spending more than they could earn. As for Mr. Bernard, he liked Mme. R. almost more than La Ginna, and when she told him not to put his thumb in his waistcoat sleeve he felt she had made a gentleman of him. Gradually they had broken him of the habit of nudging and telling the price of things, and he felt they honestly liked him and

wished him well, and would never ridicule him behind his back. How few rich people have such friends! and he appreciated them.

“Now, ladies, you come right up with me in my automobile and your hired help can come up in a ’bus; no, they’ll get lost. I’ll send them in a cab.”

Mme. R. thanked him, but explained that their hours would make them impossible as visitors. They worked for their living and must live accordingly. They would see him every day, of course, go to the Stock Exchange, lunch at Sherry’s—no, they would not wear American Beauties to lunch, but would be delighted to have a few in their rooms. They were distressed that Mrs. Bernard was “ailing.”

“What is that?” asked Mme. R., getting a little bored at standing so long in the hall.

“Just too much oats, I tell her,” answered Mr. Bernard cheerfully. “She’s used to the simple life, which she thinks isn’t dignified in white marble; and I

keep telling her that because she has a show house she needn't live in misery all the time, with tight clothes and poisonous perfumes. She's afraid to stay in a wrapper ten minutes, afraid she'll miss something; and she goes to every tea, dinner, lunch or funeral she can squeeze into. I tell her that well-bred folks appreciate people being natural, and being uneasy don't make you appear the real thing. By gum! I'd rather have people know I had brains enough to know I wasn't a Vere de Vere, but had made my own fortune and had wits to help along my friends than think me a silly old Josh that liked my evening clothes too well to cough even if I were choking. That's why I get on so well in England. By the way, there is a real swell here now; just met him, so nice and friendly. Going to be Prime Minister I'd bet my bottom dollar."

Mme. R. moved back impatiently. "You can come upstairs to our sitting-room if you want to talk any more. I'm going to lie down. I feel sea-sick and everything is twirling around."

“Mme. R., I can’t really stay. My wife is waiting to know about how many spare rooms you would want. But you will promise to dine with us to-morrow night? I have asked the English Lord and Lady—she’s a beauty, and lots of her. They are a little hard up, I guess. They brought letters to me, and drove up to my house from the steamer a few days ago. Well now, good-bye. Eight o’clock to-morrow, 8020 Fifth Avenue. It will be a real honor to have you, as after to-morrow you will be acting and can’t dine anywhere. I have asked twenty people to dine and will have some music afterwards.”

He was gone in an instant and the two women were caught in the jam and pushed toward the elevator. Lucky it was that no reporter asked at that moment for their impressions of New York.

CHAPTER II.

THE marble house was beautiful, and Mrs. Bernard enjoyed it so much that perhaps it did make her delicate; but she was a pretty woman, kindly and over-anxious to please. She looked well at the foot of her table. A heavy, handsome Englishman, with grey hair and beard, sat on her right; the prospective Prime Minister, she whispered to a dyspeptic foreigner on her left. Mme. R. sat on her host's right hand and, after much discussion, La Ginna had been placed between the future Minister and an American with a grandfather; a possession that made him feel rather ashamed of being found dining with the Bernards. One grandfather is always more of a care than a line of ancestors. He was careful to tell both ladies he was next to that neither he nor his wife had ever had the pleasure of meeting their host or hostess before, but had accepted

the invitation because they were so anxious to see the new house (with great emphasis on the new)! La Ginna, with glorious mirth in her eyes, told him how grateful he should be, as, if he and his host had met, he might never have been invited. The rebuke was felt but not acknowledged, and they drifted into questions and answers, the strangers' hackneyed dinner talk, until the meal was three-parts over.

Mme. R. found a charming companion on her right at table, who effectually cured her of that fond delusion so many foreigners have, that Americans are never born ladies and gentlemen, but occasionally are made such altogether by circumstances. She was enchanted with her evening. From the conservatory came the sound of trickling water in the marble fountain, blended with the notes of violins. The water scintillated with vari-colored lights, and the scene from the dining-room looked like fairyland.

"Signorina Ginna." She started and paled. "Our hostess has not introduced

us, but I am loath to be cheated out of my share of your society. Will you allow me to present myself to you as a devoted slave and admirer ever since I saw you play Sappho last spring. I am not a keen theatre-goer, and but a humble critic, but except once in my whole life I have not been so moved; and that was not at a play."

There was a short pause. La Ginna's breast heaved. She closed her eyes for a second, and tore eighteen years away from her life. She had suspected it was Neil Everett when she heard of the prospective Prime Minister. That news she had heard in Paris, for she kept "*au courant*" of all English affairs, although she had until lately avoided meeting English people. In an instant she had found herself and was playing her part like the great actress she was. Swiftly she ran her eyes over his face and saw him as he was, with no illusions. Well-fed, prosperous, heartless, a fine animal, he just missed greatness; just missed being a real leader. No emotions had distorted

his regularity of feature; no affections had lent tenderness or dignity to his few lines of age or his grey hair. He was merely growing old. She thought and said aloud:

“So you liked my Sappho? It is not supposed to be my best part; I am a comedienne.”

He looked at her with his head on one side, the same old trick.

“Laughter is akin to tears—not a new, but a pregnant truth. We learn to laugh and to value laughter through our tears.”

He looked amused.

“Surely that is rather a paradoxical statement.”

She resented the light mockery in his tone, and went on seriously:

“Perhaps you have never laughed in your life, or only at a practical joke, or an acquaintance’s misfortune; then the joy of being alive, the humor of life and incident, the clouds and their silver linings—why, you have missed it all—all!”

Her emotional voice stirred him like a mental caress, and he loved talking

about himself. Who else is so interesting? After all, he was tired of flattery and the talk of social parrots. However unpleasant her thoughts about him might be, at least they were thoughts, and her own.

“Do you like Daudet’s point of view?”

“What was it?”

“I think he meant to show the rottenness of men—and women—and the strength of habit. What do you think, Signorina?”

Her eyes were dropped on her own clasped hands for a moment, then she raised them to his face.

“It would be no use for me to tell you, because you wouldn’t understand.”

“What an odd woman!” he thought.

“She probably doesn’t know herself.”

She read his thoughts evidently, for she added:

“But my conception of the part moved you?”

He acknowledged that it had, but he thought it a mistake to get sentimental ideas about those subjects.

“Yes, but then don’t miss the point?”

She stirred him in some strange way. It was not her beauty, she was distinctly a “has been,” *fanée*; exquisitely chiselled and moulded, but worn and white. Yet one felt the fire burning within, and on the stage, when the bloom of youth was supplied, she was marvelously lovely. Her teeth gleamed like jewels, and her glossy masses of coarse black hair had not one thread of grey in the heavy braid coiled about her head.

“You are so used to having people try to please you, it must bore you to talk to a perfect stranger who has not one thought in common with you, not one sympathy, not one interest; and I—am not used to trying to please. I am used to having people try to please me.”

“Yes, I can imagine that. But you are quite wrong in supposing you do not interest me.”

She laughed.

“If I do, it is only because I don’t care in the least if I interest you or not. It is a matter of absolute indifference

to me." But her words were followed by the most seductive smile he had ever seen on a woman's face, and he wished the savory would not come so soon. He always had hated this rushing through meals.

"We are soon to part; can't I see you to-morrow? My life is very dull and commonplace and busy, and we are here for a holiday, and to make money. We shall sail in a few days if all goes well; and I would give worlds to have a really long talk with you."

"But you would never know me well."

"Perhaps not. But I would have a try. I can't express myself readily, but—all the world's a stage."

She raised her fan to stop him.

"Let me tell you something newer than that and equally true. All Life is an Allegory. We each represent one, and yours—"

"Pray tell me mine?"

The violins in unison all cried aloud to her soul and she saw no one in the room about her. Her voice sounded

so low he heard her speak with difficulty.

“Yours is that of a boy who was given bit by bit everything that he wanted from the legs of a fly, the nest of the poor little linnet, to the hearts, honor, and faith of women, and a jewelled ball; and that you prized most. You tossed it in the air higher and higher, so that all the world might see; and one day you tossed it so high that—you thought it never came down again. But it did, in the dark, and rolled into a poisonous swamp, and was covered with mud and slime, your poor little ball. You missed it a little, then more and more; not because you had any tender association with that ball, but because you have never seen another like it, or one you could toss out of sight. But others have seen the jewels—”

“And where will I find them, tell me.”

He leaned heavily on the table fascinated as he asked her, his face flushed and excited. All saw him; his wife could hardly believe her eyes. Had La

Ginna woven a spell around him? Some of the people near them looked uncomfortable. Piccina felt she had him in her power, and was elated, but merciful. He was entirely unconscious of his conspicuousness, or of the hostess trying to make the move for the ladies to go into the drawing-room. He sat as if in a trance. Piccina burst out laughing, and drew the attention of the people to her away from him. Mme. R. called out to ask the cause of her merriment.

“I have indeed had a blow,” she gasped. “Lord—lord—I do not even know his name!” more laughter—“and I have had a talk, and he has taken me for a philosopher, and forgotten I am only a comedy player. Dear me, how funny!”

He gazed at her speechless, and she swept away past him out with the other women into the drawing-room. Lord Frost clapped his hand for an instant to his forehead, and came back to the every-day world again, finding all the men merrier than he felt himself.

Mr. Bernard joined Signorina Ginna after dinner.

“You have mashed him flat,” he said, indicating Lord Frost with his thumb.

“I am delighted,” she answered sincerely, and changed the subject.

CHAPTER III.

THE following afternoon was a real Indian summer day in November. Mme. R. and Piccina sped through the park in Mr. Bernard's motor car, with Mrs. Bernard pointing out the objects of interest. They did not go to tea, as they both wished to rest before their first performance that night. Every seat and box had been sold in both houses, and it seemed as if their advertisements had positively painted the town red. Each knew her part well, and the only preparation they needed was to get some air and rest and read a little before going to the theatre. This was a trick Piccina had learned from Mme. R., to stimulate her mind to its utmost before going on, in whatever line she was to play. In their sitting-room they found on their return a huge box of orchids from Lord Frost for La Ginna. She threw aside the

card and went into her room to put on something soft and loose, then stretched herself out on the sofa before a cheery fire and rang for her tea. Mme. R. was resting in her bedroom.

The orchids lay in their box untouched at her feet. She could not read; she was thinking, parading old memories one by one in the fire-light, memories that she had seldom encouraged since she first went to Paris, little more than a child, and laid her broken and contrite heart at Mme. R.'s feet, begging her to ask no questions, but to teach a sinner to work and forget, for her mother's sake. The actress, who had inspired many a passion, had caught the child in her arms. She knew how to love and had been loved; and she taught Georgina Allerti to use all that energy and temperament which had been so cruelly and prematurely developed; to use it in her art, to play and hide, to draw and inflame, any emotion she wanted to. Ginnie took the name of "La Ginna," and Madame R. called

her "Piccina." She told her friend briefly that she had been in England, been in love, and wanted to be a great actress.

"Enough; then sorrow no more. Learn to laugh at all it is not in your power to change, and make others cry, but never cry yourself."

As she said it, however, she wiped away tears from her own eyes and kissed the friendless little girl tenderly. Ginnie loved her at once, and gratitude came with great thumps and bounds into her heart.

"Is it because you and I are born in the south that we are so—so different from the English?" asked Ginnie, clinging passionately to her warm, soft breast.

"No, it is only because we have felt hunger—that we enjoy eating—we have felt loneliness and appreciate love. We have to fight the world with our wits and it teaches us to see where we are going and to study our prey. Three-quarters of the great mass of sheep that pay to see us cannot afford the money they spend on their pleasure; these sheep,

I say, we guide and use and excite; oh God! what a responsibility! What good we could do, had we not had all the good kicked out of us at the bottom of the ladder before we had the strength to climb it! Save your tears; save your energy; save your emotion. All your suffering shall one day bring you in an income of solid gold."

How true these words had proved! Piccina had studied with tireless determination. She had read and seen everything in the way of art that she could, and after a few weeks had taken an insignificant part in the great actress' company and had gradually worked her way upward. Two years ago she had taken her own theatre and had suddenly awakened to find herself famous. Her French, Italian, and English were perfect, and she could act equally well in either language.

Formerly Mme. R.'s virtues had consisted mainly in her generosity and kindness of heart, and her days had been spent without the ties of home

life. Now that she had taken up this young waif of fortune, and had felt the first warnings of advancing years, all her energies and maternal instinct went out to the child in the longing to shield her from the temptations and hardships of her chosen profession. The world thought "La Ginna" must have a lover, but no one could ever suggest who might be the lucky man, and soon gossips gave up trying and left her name clean and untarnished. Piccina saw in her benefactress only an angel disguised as a genius, and one night Mme. R. knelt down alone and said the first prayers she had said in thirty years.

"Thank God that somebody has come into my life who thinks me good!" Then she went over to the glass and put fresh powder on her face.

And now their friendship was still as strong as ever. It is Piccina who must rub away a headache or attend to the smallest want. For Mme. R. it was Piccina's criticism only that

counted at rehearsals, and her opinion of a book or a painting the only opinion worth hearing. Now that she was getting old Piccina begged her to leave the stage and let her own efforts support the two, and Mme. R. at last had consented that this would be her final appearance. She would retire in the height of her glory, for her youth had been marvellously preserved. Beauty she had never had.

CHAPTER IV.

“**C**OME in. Ah! is it Lord Frost?
Shew him in.”

Ginnie had fallen asleep, and was only half awake when her visitor entered. Just one light burned on a low table behind the sofa. She had not meant to see any callers, but was so taken by surprise at hearing the name of the man about whom she had just been dreaming, that she let him come in. He stood before her with his hat, stick and gloves in hand, begging her not to rise.

“I will take you at your word, then. This is my hour of rest, and I always lie down.”

She laid her hand on the arm chair near her head, inviting him to sit beside her. He looked very haggard and pale from the night before.

“I have not rested for a moment since seeing you last evening,” he began at once.

“And is the stock market as bad as all that?”

“Not as bad as that, but pretty bad nevertheless. I hope there will be a change for the better before next Wednesday, when I must sail, as much depends on my getting back to England before the first of December—anyway, I did very well in yesterday’s market, so I must not complain.”

“If Mr. Bernard has been advising you, I am sure you have come out well. He is a speculative genius. But, pray, what have you done with the great fortune your father left you, and how comes it that you need to speculate?”

“Ah!—you know something about my poor father?”

“I have heard of him.”

“Well, I borrowed ahead, you see; then I speculated and lost; borrowed again, and then, luckily, got to know Mr. Bernard, and came out here hoping he would do something for me. While we have not been positively hungry, we have had to give up a good many things

of late which it bores me to do without."

Then they fell to talking about his father, and Ginnie asked many questions concerning the last years of his life. She loved hearing about the dear old man, and Neil spoke of him with much affection and admiration.

"Though I hardly know England, having only had a glimpse of it as a child, the papers have made me familiar with some names. I like to hear nice things about people I have learned to respect. The Duke of Grantley—I read—was to be married?"

"The papers are aching to get him married, but he is severely single. Rather selfish of him, I think. It is natural that a man should prefer his liberty, but I think that a man of his position should marry to keep up his name."

"Aren't there other ways of keeping up great names besides breeding?"

"Oh, yes, I daresay; but the popular idea is that an eldest son should marry for the sake of an heir."

"I cannot agree with you. I think that a man is doing better things by being noble and useful to his country than by marrying without any holy feeling. However, being an old maid myself, I am always glad to air my views on matrimony."

Neil laughed nervously and bent over to poke the fire, which did it distinct harm.

"We were talking about Grantley. Rather a curious sort of chap, Bertie is. He has spent enormous sums on all kinds of reform movements, like building tenements for the poor with bath-rooms, which they only use for storage. Also, which most people don't know, he is very keen on encouraging artists, writers, musicians, and all those helpless sort of ducks."

Neil rose from the ruined fire and stood with his back to it, flapping his coat-tails.

"Are you and he great friends?" asked Ginnie.

"No. I can't say we are, although

I always feel sure that Grantley would not say behind my back what he really thought about me, unless he were cornered." Neil's momentary candor was delightful. Ginnie laughed.

"That is the sort of stuff friends are made of, even if they aren't ours."

She smiled so sympathetically that he felt as if her world had always been his, and said, leaning towards her:

"But why do I talk to you like this—about all sorts of things far away from you?"

"Because they are near to you. People always do talk to me about things near to them, not to me."

The note of loneliness was entirely lost on Neil. He went on as if talking to himself:

"It's funny how things change. Now, I had a wild Irish friend—nobody thought he would ever be caught. But he was, and by the last person in the world one would have suspected, and now he is the father of an enormous family of Jew boys, which must be a great trial.

But they say he is devoted to his unattractive wife, and has dowered all his sisters and some of his cousins and aunts. He is bursting into politics himself. Kindest man in the world, Hamilton is. It's a pity he couldn't marry Mrs. Van Ebens, but she and I were rather pals once, and to tell the truth, I fear she has never quite got over it, although I shouldn't say so."

He laughed uneasily and continued: "She and Grantley are inseparable, and yet there has never been a breath of scandal about them. Grantley can do anything and nobody abuses him, whereas I can't move without treading on someone's toes. She has grown quite a power in London; not as young as she might be, but looks thirty-five. She helps Bertie with all his schemes and visits the miserable, and all that sort of thing. It's extraordinary what she has developed into. I would never have believed eighteen years ago that she could have been a useful woman."

Ginnie smiled and moved a trifle.

"Eighteen years is a long, long time," she said, "and the good or bad in us has plenty of chance to grow. But you—are suddenly drawn to me, cling to me, lean on me! It amuses me." She turned her weird eyes full into his.

"I can't think why I talk to you this way—"

"You said that before!" She laughed. "You see my art gives me great balance, it helps me to see things in their true proportions. That is why I appreciate, it is why you find me sympathetic. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, go on." He rose and lit cigarettes for her and himself, and sat down again opposite, close to her. "Of course I follow you. You believe that mirth and laughter are life. You are a great comedienne, and your art has taught you that. I quite agree with you."

She shook her head wearily, then blew a ring of smoke into the air and watched it fade before she answered:

"That is not quite what I meant. I have indeed learned to cherish the sound

of honest mirth as something holy, something sent by God to help us to live, help us to live!" She stretched out her arms passionately, and let them drop at once again. "But that—is not life."

Again she had woven her spell about him.

"It is so strange," he said, "the way you talk, and look."

"What do I look like?"

He criticized her mentally for a few minutes.

"You are like a tigress."

"A tigress?"

"Yes, and perhaps you come out among people only to tear them limb from limb, devour them, and leave their bones, or soul, to bleach in the sun."

"What a sweet nature you have drawn for mine! I wonder you came so far to tell me this."

"I didn't come just to tell you this, but I wanted to tell you this too."

"Oh! do you feel better now?" She turned her face toward him with an irresistible smile. He longed to crush

her in his arms. He often longed to seize women, and usually did, but he was afraid of this one. She saw what he felt, so she said, turning away from him:

“Do you know what I fear for you? An awful catastrophe.”

“And what is that, pray?”

“That you are falling in love with me, which would be rather a trial, for I am not the wife your mamma would approve of. Besides, I quite forgot, and so did you, that you have a wife.”

She seemed to have sprinkled him with cold water, but his fire was not to be quenched so easily.

“Well, suppose I do—am—are in love with you?”

“Well, if you do—am—are in love with me—take care of yourself, for I won’t.”

“What do you mean by ‘you won’t’?”

“I only mean that you have probably never been in love before, and it would strike deep. I have been in love, and it might be a temptation for me to make you suffer as I once suffered—and—I always yield to temptation.”

She flung her arm up high above her head in a maddening attitude. He could not make out if he dare hope to win her, one day, for his mistress, or if she was as pure as she looked. A woman's mouth, he knew, seldom deceives a practised eye.

"I believe I am falling in love with you. I came very near it once in my youth, but never have been really in love before."

"Tell me about it. Was the girl in love with you or did you marry for—for curiosity?"

He flushed and answered:

"It was before I was married. A little cousin of mine."

"Do tell me about it. It sounds most romantic. And was she silly enough to be fond of you?"

"Thank you. Yes, she was silly enough to be fond of me. She was a strange, half-mad creature, and had visions of becoming Lady Frost, and being relieved of money worries. She was quite young, about seventeen, and I confess I was charmed with her, because she was so different from other girls—the

scheming little wretch! She put me through my tricks like a performing poodle, but my mother came into the breach like a soldier and packed her off, and I found my head and made a sensible marriage. Everybody in England was talking about it at the time. Odd, you never heard about it."

"I never see much of English people. You know I don't like them."

"Don't you? And we are all mad about you in London. Paris means 'La Ginna' to three-quarters of the men."

"That is only because they can't meet me. I am too busy to talk like this at home to people in the afternoon. Madame R. does all that sort of thing. Here I am out for pleasure, but go on and tell me more about your cousin. Why did you not marry her, and what did your mother do?"

"Oh! it is a long story, but mother found out she was an illegitimate child."

"Did you tell her?"

"Yes, I felt it my duty; and then mother felt it her duty to sacrifice the girl

for me, and she told her she must leave the house at once, rather cleverly making her feel she had committed an awful crime—not to have told us sooner the circumstances of her birth. Mother also made her promise not to tell my father, so we just let him think she had run away. We concluded that was best. My father felt very badly.”

“About what?”

“About Ginnie’s departure. Her name was Ginnie Allerti. I suppose she is swathed in sables and jewels somewhere to-day. I must say she has behaved rather well not to hunt us up or make a fuss. However, I doubt if anybody would have received her in England, after mother and Lady Barr had finished with her.”

“Then—she believed your mother thought she had done wrong—and your mother, in her heart, did not think she had done wrong, but merely lied to save you—from what she thought was an unwise marriage?”

“Exactly, yes. It sounds brutal, but after all, I am a man of the world, and

realize that the many must be sacrificed for the few."

"Who chooses the few?"

"The few choose themselves." They both laughed mirthlessly.

"And had this—this little Ginnie not one friend in England?"

"Yes, one or two, Mrs. Van Ebens, and Grantley, always stood by her, but I doubt if the former saw her again. My wife is very bitter about this part of my past."

"Have you no curiosity to see her now, in spite of jewels and sables, or whatever depths your mother's sense of duty may have plunged her into?"

"I can't honestly say I have, and hardly think I should recognize her. I am afraid she might become a care to me. You know how these eager, intense people are—pistols, poison—or one is bombard-ed to death with notes."

"So you think that she might still care for you?"

"She might. She was so odd."

"So you prefer to let yourself fall in

love with me, which, in your self-conceit, you feel quite harmless and safe! But let me warn you—I love to please, and I—I might try to teach you to laugh. You must go now as I am obliged to dress. Pray don't light the other light. My eyes feel tired; besides, I see all I want of you as it is. To-morrow I fear I am engaged, and a thousand thanks for the orchids."

She had risen while she was speaking and stood close beside him.

"But I shall be in Mr. Bernard's box to-night. May I come and see you between the acts?"

"No, perhaps I will bow to you across the footlights—and I shall make you laugh. Good-night." She extended her hand to him. He raised it to his lips and they parted. Just at that moment Madame R. poked her head in at the door.

"*Mon Dieu, chérie*, I thought he would stay forever. You must be tired out."

Ginnie embraced her, saying:

"Before I go to dress I must tell you something. Do you remember, years ago,

I came to you, staggering under the weight of a great sin?"

"Mercy yes, but I never believed it," answered the old lady impatiently.

"But I believed it. I believed what I was told. But I am so glad to be able to tell you now that I did not do anything wrong."

"What's put it in your head anyway? I never cared a bit, child, if you did or not; never gave it another thought."

"But I do—and it is—"

"There now, run along and dress. Don't go wandering on and using up all your energies thinking and feeling before you go to the theatre. I wish Lord Frost would stay at home with the old jelly-fish he married—I always did hate late callers. Now, Ginnie, to business. I want you to put this spoiled American press into a fever of admiration to-night. We both ought to, for that matter, as I have spent a small fortune on conciliatory tactics already." She pushed Piccina into the adjoining dressing-room, and went on muttering to herself.

CHAPTER V.

THE first night was an unqualified success for both actresses.

They met in their common sitting-room at the Waldorf as they sat down to their primitive supper of bread and milk, eggs and fruit, in their dressing-gowns. Mme. R.'s mood grew sympathetic after the light repast, and she drew Piccina on to talk about her late visitor, and then for the first time the girl told her the full history of her past, finally giving her a description of the afternoon's call. The old actress pushed her dirty plate so far away she almost upset the milk pitcher, and with a thoroughly disgusted expression on her face, looked straight into the fire for some minutes before speaking.

"Hanging is too good for them all. They haven't enough feeling to feel the rope; they wouldn't even feel sea-sick if they swung. But we will think out some

way to repay them, some way to make him crawl and grovel at your feet, to spend his money, probe his secrets, puncture his career, and then we will both kick him into an ash-heap and jump on his remains as long as we have breath in our bodies. There, I feel better. Go and get me my curling-kids and send the maid to bed. I am ready to talk to you half the night. Anger always makes me feel young."

Ginnie fetched the things and Mme. R. began rolling up her hair in front of the sitting-room mirror.

"I don't want to waste my time talking about them with folded hands. Bernard would do anything for you and me. I think he likes me best, in his heart, and I will make him ruin Lord Frost financially; we'll tumble his stocks, humiliate him, and his mother, and wife, and the only child he dares to acknowledge."

Ginnie said nothing, and the other went on, frenzied with delight at making the most horrible and degrading picture of Neil's future. Once Ginnie remonstrated

feebly, but the old actress turned on her savagely:

“Shame, shame! There are enough novels written without punishing the hero, enough tragedies in life where men go unpunished because women are afraid. Life is a test of courage, and those who cannot fight should be poisoned in time to save themselves from worse than death. Why, it’s the women who can’t fight who are ruined. It’s the men who can’t fight who drift into all vices. It’s the passions we cannot fight that conquer and consume us. Never talk to me of not fighting, and, thank God, I have fought all my life, and will until I draw my last breath—fight for justice. These people who pretend to be so good; these pillars of the church, that people like you and I, surrounded, as we are, by every temptation, look upon as models and angels; these pillars of the church, I say, who hold themselves so high we hardly dare look up in their faces, do more harm to us—humanity at large—than all the jail-birds that ever lived. We hope some-

thing of them; we expect something of them, but we only find them more cowardly, more cruel, more worldly than the sharpest harlot on the boulevards. To think that to save that rotten man your life, your honor, your reputation was all sacrificed, and in the name of duty—and that his poor father's one joy was taken from him, and that he should be made to think you heartless and ungrateful while those society vultures pounced on your memory—ugh!—I hate it all, that senseless society, that empty morality—that hypocrisy—”

Words at last failed her. She stopped breathless, her eyes blazing. Ginnie was truly touched by her sympathy and love, although she could not quite agree with all she said, and knew it was fatal to argue with her, and would only put her into a more violent temper.

Madame R. looked about her, seizing the unoffending orchids and thrusting them into the flame, she watched them sizzle with a smile of satisfaction. Ginnie closed her arms about her.

Mme. R. pushed her gently away from her.

“I do believe I’m going to cry myself—run away to bed now, I want to write some letters and be alone.”

CHAPTER VI.

IT was nearly noon when Ginnie rang for her breakfast. She had slept late, and then read her letters and papers, saving a note from Neil for the last. The criticisms of her previous night's performance were very good, better than she had expected. She had treated the reporters like human beings, and arranged with civility to meet all who wanted to see her; after all, they were earning a living, just as she was—which many are inclined to forget.

Neil's letter looked fat and interesting as she turned it over in her hand, and with it was a small box from a jeweller, also addressed in his handwriting. There was no personal pleasure in hearing from him, just pride satisfied, feeling him *émotionné*, crawling at her feet, grateful for a word or smile, because he was a worm, with a coronet over his slimy head—surely not

a conquest to be proud of. Prime Minister? Fiddlesticks! He had not the first symptom of greatness in his whole make-up. She thought over the match his mamma had arranged so carefully for him, and wondered that a woman with such a reputation for cleverness could have done such a stupid thing. He was a little richer, but Vivien had not stimulated his brain, his character, or career, and far from helping him to fulfil his ambition, had dragged him down with her own purposeless life. "How can so many mothers pick out such wives for their sons?" thought Ginnie. Mme. R. had fanned her faint feeling of bitterness toward Neil into a longing for revenge; she would like to make him realize that the poor little cousin, whom they had not thought good enough to bear the family name, was at least a woman of power and influence, while the one they had selected was not. Ginnie was not conceited, but she realized that her weapons for the battle of life had been few, and she

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had won it. At seventeen she had gone alone into the world where men and women live through their wits, equipped simply with a high sense of truth and honor, a warm heart, a devoted servant and a diamond chain. Nobody had been happier at Ginnie's triumph than poor old Felicia, and Ginnie was glad her success had been won before that beloved companion died.

Ginnie was always ready to share with poor miserable humanity everything she could. Neil, on the contrary, had gone into the world determined to get everything from every one for his own use and advancement, to share nothing with any one that he could help, and to give as little for what he got as possible. When he started speculating, it was rather with the feeling that American stocks would rise for being bought by him; but they didn't, and it was when he began to see things crumbling away that he courted Mr. Bernard's friendship in England, although in their earlier acquaintance he had been barely

civil to him, feeling that American men were not of his own class. Mr. Bernard, on the other hand, expected to race in England the following spring, and felt that a few tips on stocks would be well invested. He had done a great deal for Neil that only a very rich, kind and clever man could do; had advised him which of his stocks were cats and dogs, and even carried some for him. The consequence was, by the way things looked now, Neil was in a fair way to clear twenty thousand pounds by the acquaintance. The night they went together to see Ginnie make her *début* in New York, by the time the curtain went down it was "Dick" and "Neil," with a parting poke in the ribs responded to by "Old fellow." Neil drove home on air. La Ginna had looked divine, and how they all had laughed! Even Vivien got quite cheery and condescended to say she would like to meet her.

Lady Frost really thought La Ginna was a great actress, and it would be

rather fun to shew her off to people in London next season, if she could only be persuaded to come over. Neil promised to take his wife to call on her in a day or two, and told her also that as she was such a great friend of Mr. Bernard's, it would be wise to be most civil to her.

"Oh! I see, Neil, why you appeared so *épris* the other night. At first, I confess, I nearly felt jealous; for she seemed to have put you in a trance."

"Remember, Vivien, La Ginna is an actress of worldwide reputation now. She took it upon herself to tell me a fairy story or allegory or something about a jewelled ball, and with her marvellous power of rendering she took me completely off my feet, and I actually felt myself stumbling through a dismal swamp searching for it. It had been tossed out of sight, and—perhaps—"

Neil turned to look at his wife, again caught in the web of thought La Ginna had plunged him into. Vivien's face,

distinct in the electric light of the motor cab, was an enamelled blank.

“What are you rambling on about? Your financial success has gone to your head. Speaking of stocks, Neil, can’t we go home by way of Canada and get some furs? I want an ermine-lined dressing-gown. I hear Mme. R. has one, and the houses at home are so cruelly cold. Besides, I am longing to see Montreal. It must be such a pretty sight to see the French Indians walking through the streets in their colored blankets. Then if we can spare the time, we might go to Vancouver for a week-end. I’ve read so much about the Klondyke. When we get back to England people, are sure to ask us about Canada.”

CHAPTER VII.

GINNIE still lay in bed, turning over her letter, as yet unopened.

After her breakfast was finished she opened the box, and out of some pink cotton wool and tissue paper rolled a gold ball the size of a robin's egg heavily studded with uncut jewels. It looked like Indian work, exquisitely done, with a perfect blending of colors; then she read the letter:

DEAR SIGNORINA,

I have been out early this morning looking for the jewelled ball. The last two nights have robbed me of the desire to sleep, and what is there worth having without desire? In no conventional haunts could I find one; and the dismal swamps are frozen over near New York. But in a pawn shop I chanced to find this; I am sure it has a history. You will perhaps be generous enough to spare me the time to go and tell you it,

at least as much as I could learn from the vulture from whom I bought it. Last night I noticed you wore a diamond chain, the most beautiful one I have ever seen. It hung nearly to your knees. If to-night, when I go to see your comedy again, I find the jewelled ball is hanging from it, I shall feel that my search has not been in vain. You will, I know, be glad to hear I am less worried about finances. I do like that man Bernard so much, and Mrs. Bernard we find equally charming. If you could spare me an hour to-morrow I should so like to bring my wife to see you and Mme. R.

Yours,

FROST.

“Are you up yet?”

Mme. R. walked into her room just as La Ginna was folding up her letter. Ginnie handed it to her to read, with her present. Mme. R. made a grimace as she threw both down.

“He wants to be devoted to you, to keep in Bernard’s good graces. That

is very plain. By all means hang his bit of rubbish on your chain. Pay him in his own coin, and I will get Bernard to drop him with such a thud that it will echo across the continent. Take everything you can get from him. I hate to see you wear his mother's chain, but some day he must be made to recognize it. Lead him on all you can; make him look shrivelled and ridiculous when you are through with him. Get up now, for we must get some more air before we see the newspaper people—and I must have my face enamelled—and three girls are coming to me for advice about going on the stage. Heavens! I almost forgot them! And I make it a rule never to disappoint young people. It hurts so dreadfully before one is twenty."

Mme. R. sighed and drew her luxurious matinee cloak about her as she left the room. Ginie promised to get up the moment she had written one letter, which she gave to her maid to send at once by a messenger. She lay still for

a few minutes afterwards, going over the contents again in her mind:

DEAR LORD FROST,

“Your reminder shall hang on my diamond chain. We should be delighted to have you bring Lady Frost to call to-morrow afternoon at tea-time.

“Very sincerely,

“G.A.”

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a very mixed party that the Frosts encountered with Mme. R. at the Waldorf. The room was heavily scented with lilies. Mme. R., however large, was graceful to a degree, in a mass of purple chiffon and lace, with no attempt at a waist; La Ginna was in an absolutely plain emerald green velvet tea-gown, bordered with sable, opening low at the throat. The chain of diamonds hung heavily against it since the addition of the jewelled ball. One or two newspaper critics were having the time of their lives, a poet, a painter, and the two or three young female adorers that usually shadow a great artist for autographs and advice finished the party. Mme. R. had just finished signing her name when Lady Frost came in. Like a great many English women of her class, she had much better manners abroad than at

home. She was still handsome in an artificial way, with very red cheeks and quantities of bulging blonde curls, forming a broad frame around her face; with marble eyes and a high-pointed bust and sloping bottle hips. Vivien sat down with some difficulty on the highest chair in the room, and showed her teeth at her hostess in a pleasant attempt at a smile. She was not one of those whose inward disposition had felt the sensations of a smile, and consequently the outward charm of that irresistible expression was wholly absent. La Ginna coiled beside her into a chair, with a subtle grace that Lord Frost did not fail to notice. How beautiful she looked; how high-bred, and what a wonderful lustre in her eyes, like a serpent! Lady Frost felt her charm too, as Ginnie was determined that she should. She had visions of becoming a bit of a Bohemian herself, and was anxious to cultivate a different lot of people to which she had heretofore been accustomed. She had always envied Muriel Van Ebens the

power she had of attracting around her interesting people of all sorts and classes, and she mentally determined to see more of her in the future when she returned to England, though she had never been able entirely to repress a certain feeling of jealousy of her former rival; and this, too, in spite of the fact that Neil had often said he never could have married the woman, had she been the last one on earth—a statement which has comforted many a wife.

“You have never been to New York before, I believe?” began Ginnie in her seductive voice. “Does not the noise of screaming, rolling and puffing things get on your nerves as it does on mine?”

Vivien again showed her teeth, and Neil interrupted by saying his wife had no nerves and was much to be envied. He wished to take her west very much, to the Dakotas if they had time; he had some cousins who had started a ranch out there.

“How fascinating!” said Ginnie. “I do wish I could see that country. What sort of a ranch?”

"Cotton ranch," answered Vivien.

"Cotton, really? As far west as that?"

"O yes, it is a wonderful sight, I believe. Thousands and thousands of sheep, and the cotton sheared right off their backs and shipped in carloads to—where, Neil, did you say it was shipped to?"

Neil was not listening. The jewelled ball had caught his attention, and with raised eyebrows he sat wondering.

"What wonderful sheep!" said Ginnie with a mischievous laugh, "to grow cotton. One always somehow associates them with wool; but I suppose they grow cotton in summer and wool in winter."

Neil came to his wife's rescue gallantly. "You are thinking of what Mr. Bernard told you about picking cotton in the south."

"But he never mentioned picking wool," insisted Vivien, with characteristic stubbornness. Lord Frost laughed, and changed the subject to the charms of

Mrs. Bernard, whom he found so kind and hospitable, and so devoted to her children; and what fascinating children! so pretty and clever—he was much impressed by American motherhood. Neil had struck a sympathetic chord in Vivien. She echoed his sentiments, and was truly touched by the kind hospitality Mrs. Bernard had shown them in a thousand ways. She was a Western woman with no affectation, who really loved the world she was beginning to move in. How few women do! She took endless pains about every one and everything; it was her genuine goodness which caused people to forget to criticize. She was proud of her husband, and they understood each other perfectly.

Ginnie did not enjoy the three-cornered conversation, so she sent Neil over to Mme. R. to find out what date in January they would be in London, when he had promised to entertain them, while she continued her commonplaces with Vivien. Presently they fell to dis-

cussing dresses and corsets, a subject on which the latter at once became eloquent, and when they parted, would have voted her listener as the cleverest and most charming woman she had ever met.

Mme. R. was all graciousness to Neil, and promised to dine with him in London the first Friday in January. She confessed a longing to meet Mrs. Van Ebens, whom artists all adored. Then they fell to talking about Piccina.

"Tell me something about her?" he asked, settling himself comfortably beside her.

"She is the greatest living actress," said Mme. R. impressively, shaking her finger at him. "I have known her all her life and her mother before her."

"How interesting, how extraordinary! And is she well-born?"

"What do you mean by well-born? Born from a long line of blue-blooded fools or a short line of red-blooded intellects?" She turned her piercing eyes full on him. He squirmed under their gaze as he answered:

"All I mean is that she suggests a history—something out of the ordinary."

"Well her father and mother loved not wisely but too well. They aren't the only ones, so I am not giving anybody away—and this child, many years ago, became attached to a worthy young man whose career was being run by his mother. Perhaps you don't know, Lord Frost, how fatal that is?"

He entirely agreed with her.

"The mother broke up the match, and Piccina went on the stage. That is all; a short, commonplace story, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, hundreds like it. I had rather an experience of the same kind myself, but, of course, in Signorina Ginna's case, the man was a—a—loser."

"He was also a worm and a coward."

"Yes, yes."

"For she could have filled any position in the world with grace, tact and cleverness. She has a beautiful nature, and the sad part of it all is that she has never known well a really good man with a noble

character. It is a terrible thing to have reached the age of thirty-five and look back at the love of one's life and find a great pile of sawdust staring one in the face, which has accumulated through the years." She looked at him quizzically.

"It is indeed; ashes, at least, are some consolation, for one has the knowledge of something burned and spent."

Mme. R. laughed.

"You are cleverer than you look, Lord Frost, but I am cleverer still, and I know you are in hopes of finding some hot cinders."

He turned toward her. "Cinders in my ashes! I hope never."

"Don't play with them then. Ugh! They make a dust." She made a grimace and waved her hands in front of her face, as if to protect her from it.

"Really, you are the two oddest women I ever met. Do you believe that—"

"Neil, I think we should be going," interrupted Vivien, standing beside him. A man with a diamond ring, and daisies

embroidered on his waistcoat, had just been introduced to her, and was more than she could bear; the outsiders were grouped together in the agitated uncertainty of a departure at any moment.

“One moment, Lord Frost. Just before you came, Mr. Bernard was here and asked me to give you a message from him. He would like to see you at his house this evening. It is now scarcely six and you would just catch him. He said it was very important. I suppose you have heard what an awful day it has been in Wall Street?”

Neil trembled. “No, I did not know it. Good-night, and a thousand thanks for allowing us this glimpse of you.” He bowed low to the others, and Vivien showed her teeth, and, walked over to shake hands with La Ginna. As she stood in the dim light, there seemed a candor and kindness in her upturned face he had only remembered in one woman before, and suddenly the thought swept over him—could—could this possibly be little Ginnie? Could this woman,

who had gone through life conquering, be the one he had been afraid to marry; that his mother did not think good enough. He detected the likeness clearly, vaguely as he remembered her; the high-tempered mouth and nostrils, and the peculiar expression of her eyes. She did not give him a chance to look long and, after their good-byes were said, turned to the man with the diamond ring. As she did so a hotel servant handed her a card, and he overheard her say in a frightened tone:

“Ask him to wait—just a moment—until all these people have left the room, and then you can show him in.”

Passing out, Neil almost brushed against a grimy looking individual, with a roll of papers under his arm, waiting patiently in the corridor, and with a look upon his face that one more familiar with the sufferings of others would have recognized at once as the result of cold and hunger.

CHAPTER IX.

NEIL saw his wife into her electric brougham that was to take her back to her hotel to dress for dinner, and sprang into a hansom, calling out to the driver the address, on Fifth Avenue, of Mr. Samuel Bernard. He looked nervously at his watch and found it half-past six. They were dining at half-past eight at the Scotts, some rich people they had known in England, when Claud Scott was a popular second secretary at the American Embassy in London and one of the best polo players in England.

Neil was agitated. There was no use denying it. He had heard vaguely of the sudden slump in Wall Street that afternoon, and he trembled for the safety of the margin at his brokers—all the money he had won during the short two weeks he had been in America. He cursed his folly for not having pulled out

yesterday, as he could have done, twenty thousand pounds ahead. He had seen Bernard late the previous afternoon, when all was buoyant, but, disregarding his friend's advice, he had put all he had won into the hands of another broker with an order for two thousand shares of "Copper Reef." He was dizzy with success, and though he had of course been anxious, he had never seriously contemplated the possibility of loss. As he journeyed up Fifth Avenue a wild fear seized him that the fall in prices to-day might have even extended to the copper list, the boom which had lately attended these stocks notwithstanding.

As he passed Fifty-ninth Street he heard boys shouting: "Bad day in Wall Street!" and a poster caught his eye. "Silver stocks tumble," it said; "other big losses." Perhaps, after all, copper had not been seriously affected. He would have stopped to buy a paper, had he not been late already and known he would learn soon enough from Bernard the result of the day's

transactions, and in spite of all he felt more cheerful as the hansom drew up before the financier's house and a sense of confidence in the man's strong personality restored his assurance.

As he entered the library he received a cold shock. Bernard was seated at his desk writing, and looked up as the servant announced "Lord Frost."

"Come in, Lord Frost," he said, turning in his chair; "I see you disregarded my advice."

Neil was so taken aback by this cold reception that he could only stammer:

"How did you know?"

"How did I know?" repeated the other sharply. "Haven't Ferguson & Wells been telephoning me all afternoon, trying to find you. It seems you left only your hotel address, and made no arrangements for keeping in touch. By a mere chance they heard you knew me, and tried to find you that way. Clumsy business, I call it. Copper Reef dropped four points this morning and of course they wanted more margin, and while they were telephoning

right and left, down she went to 82, and they sold at a twelve point loss, and there's your margin gone, and twenty thousand dollars besides. I suppose you hardly expected me to cover for you. Besides, the bottom has dropped out of the stock anyway, and I knew it would. That's why I cleared out yesterday, and advised you to do the same."

For a few moments neither spoke. Neil seemed too overcome by the extent of his loss, the severity of Bernard's tone, and the realization of his own folly. He sank his head on his hands and sat silent.

"And I owe the brokers \$20,000?" he said presently, in dazed tone.

"You do," replied the banker. "Why? can't you pay it? I thought you were well off."

"So we were; but I spent pretty freely, and what with jointures and dependent relations and politics, the fortune is not what it was; and to tell you the truth, my income was so spent ahead that I came here to make money as a last

resort, before cutting down expenses and quitting politics—and just as office is in sight too! And here I am four thousand pounds worse off than I was, and no alternative but to leave the House, rent the place, and go and live abroad for ten years, even if I can manage to scratch up the four thousand pounds to settle. What a fool I've been!"

"Come now, is it so bad as all that?" said Bernard in rather softer tones. "I would not let it worry you. There'll be plenty of men as good as you for office, whatever it is, and the country won't suffer."

Neil winced. When had he ever thought of the country in the working out of his career?

"Yes, I know. I was a fool, Bernard, not to take your advice, but don't think I blame you in the least. I know you did all you could to find me to-day, and of course I couldn't expect you to cover for me. But is there nothing that can be done? Think man!" he added more vehemently. "With all your great busi-

ness knowledge, there must be something that I can do to retrieve this loss! I would do anything—anything. But it makes me mad to think of leaving the House and just missing office. Why, I have Lord Leach's positive promise that if they are returned in January, as they can't help being, he will give me the Exchequer."

"The what?"

"The Exchequer. You call it the Treasury, don't you?"

"Yes. But I thought that was a post for a business man."

The irony was lost on Neil, so excited was he at the thought of what he was so narrowly missing.

"Yes, but they always prefer to appoint men of wide knowledge of affairs, a guiding hand to the nation's weal. Besides, I have always had great influence over Lord Leach, who, between ourselves, is a bit slack at times, and he relies on me to an astounding extent. It was the same when I had the under-secretaryship for the Colonies and he was my chief, years

ago, before we went into opposition; and now that it is to be our turn next, he can hardly do without me." He stopped, rather out of breath.

Bernard had been quietly watching him with an impassive face, and without showing the least suspicion of the feelings of contempt which he had always felt for his visitor, and never more strongly than at this moment. He was a shrewd man, and had thought it well to befriend this Englishman; and besides, he was fond of hunting in England, and his wife had social aspirations in royal circles. But when that afternoon Mme. R. had called him up by telephone at his office, just as he was leaving, he had no compunction in doing what she asked him. Also, she was a woman whom he liked. Her directness and candor matched his own, and he understood her and felt that she understood him, and that they were friends. What she said was not much but to the point.

"I have found out something about Lord Frost and I hate him. Make a

fool of him in any way you can, and spoil his chances."

He had asked no questions, but said simply, "All right. Send him to me this evening if he calls."

Presently he said:

"No, there is no way that I can suggest, and if, as you say, your career is at an end—then I am very sorry for you. But there is no way out of it."

The cold indifference of his tone was the last straw.

"Look here, Bernard, I will do anything, but there must be some way out of this. Think of the blow it will be to my mother and my wife—"

"You say 'anything' as though you expected me to suggest something dishonest whereby you could make good your loss. But, by the way, there is, now I come to think of it, a little matter of a very different nature, in which you might possibly be of some use to some friends of mine. I must think it over, and may speak to you of it later."

"Why not now? Why must you keep

me in suspense? Haven't I told you, I will do anything to retrieve my fortune?"

"Well, perhaps you might not care about it. Some, over-particular people, might think it indiscreet. However, if you will, here it is: Some men I know in business have concessions in West Africa—an international syndicate, and for some reason or other they are not in especially good favor with the British Government. They are rich, and it means much to them to secure a subsidy for their wagon road into the interior. Now, you know that a large subsidy was voted last session to develop these roads, and was to be distributed to the several companies interested, at the discretion of the Exchequer, as you call it. Well, these men can get no hearing of their claims at the present, and it might be of considerable value if they had a good friend in the Government of England."

Neil caught his breath as he listened to the audacious proposition so blandly put forward by Mr. Samuel Bernard.

"I don't say they would, but they might,

be willing to offer a considerable inducement to an influential man like you, especially with immediate prospects of appointment to the office concerned. But, of course," he continued, "they would be sure to want written pledge that what they were paying for would be carried out. Now, it happens," he went on, without giving the other time to interject, "that the head of this organization is here in New York, and whatever he does will be acceptable to the others. So, if you really wish it, I could speak to him to-morrow on the subject."

Never in his life had Neil Everett been face to face with temptation in so direct a manner. He thought he knew right from wrong, but he had a faculty of confounding the two, and usually pursued his course under the impression that he had acted rightly and always for the best. Here, however, there could be no doubt; one course was right and one was wrong, and he knew it. The struggle was short, sharp, and decisive, and left him pale.

"How much do you suppose they would be willing to—eh—advance?"

CHAPTER X.

MME. R. put on her glasses to see the name written on the card Piccina had handed her. "Signor Allerti"—Ginnie's father, her mother's deserter.

"Let me manage him," she cried fiercely. "I think I've fixed Lord Frost by my talk with Bernard, and made up for all the spanking he missed in his youth by being an eldest son. You go out of the room, and I'll see him alone. Now, don't waste any emotions without your footlights. Save it all; it means money to you and me. Don't waste a quiver or a sigh on him; he isn't fit to crawl at your feet. Poor child, your experience of the sterner sex has not been fortunate. Thank God, the man I loved was buried before he disillusioned me! I remember your father quite well, so you just stay in your room until I call you."

She coughed a few times and then, as if by accident, opened the door.

“Oh, Signor Allerti, I did not know you were waiting here; I thought you were down stairs. Do come in. Ginnie will be here in a few moments, but I hope you have nothing to worry her with.”

The Italian drew his thin lips up at one corner when he spoke. She had addressed him in their native tongue. His voice was sharp and thin as he reminded her of his first play that had made her famous in Naples. Yes, she never could forget what she owed him, and now, what did he want? He wanted to see his child—he had not troubled her in England, not wishing to do her harm among her grand relations. He had determined never to come near her until he could bring her something of his best, and until he could be of service to her, knowing well enough that only through his talent as a writer could he be anything else than a care and a mortification. Mme. R. heard all he had to say and noticed the threadbare buttons on his shabby over-

coat, his faded hat, and hungry, pinched face. He had made her famous, whatever else he had done. She opened the door of Ginnie's room and called her, and in an instant the woman stood in the doorway. Here was her parent, the source of her mother's suffering and hers. She stood speechless, stupefied. He made no motion to approach her, but looked at her inch by inch, a little blood warming his pinched skin. Then gradually drawing closer, with eyes and mouth opening, he stared as if in a dream and gasped:

“How absolutely lovely you are! and *mine*.”

She recoiled. He saw her repulsion and evidently sympathized with her. His soiled, bony hand was raised to his grey hair and he ran his fingers through it till it was all on end. Then the thin lips, pressed together, moved upward on the left side of his face; his eyes opened and closed several times before he spoke again.

“I wanted to come to you when I could bring you something that would be of use to you, Piccina. I know you must

hate me. I was born a wanderer, a restless soul, like you perhaps?" He raised his eyebrows questioningly. She stood motionless, and he went on:

"I have no excuses, and have been punished for all my sins. I am here to tell you that for years, ever since I saw you in Paris, I have been planning to write a play for you. I have watched you night after night at the theatre and have denied myself food and clothes just to see you develop into the genius that I felt had been begun in me. Ah! what it has meant to me nobody knows, and I only ask you, before I die, to take my play. I beg you to produce and act it. Then I will die famous, and you—you will be the greatest comedienne the world has ever seen. I beg you to be merciful to a poor old wretch who is not fit to stand before you, but who implores you to accept the fruits of his labor and give him the one moment of happiness now that he can ever know since he learned of your mother's death. I have followed you to America with it. Here it is."

He stooped and laid it at her feet. The manuscript was tied with some soiled blue ribbon. His head was bowed, and he held his hat over his heart with two shaking hands. Ginnie's eyes blazed, but he did not see them.

"I do not wish to be famous through you! It is enough to feel I am indebted to you for a miserable life. Enough, I say!"

Her voice was pregnant with feelings of hate and contempt. He did not raise his eyes again to either of them, and with a low bow he left the room. Mme. R. shook her head. Ginnie stood still for some minutes, her breast heaving and her heart beating like a trip-hammer. Then she looked about the room as if he still might be found in some corner. Mme. R. left her alone.

"Father," she whispered, stretching out her arms, "Father!"

Now that he was gone all she could remember was that he looked hungry and sick, and his clothes worn and faded. Unconsciously she passed her hand over

her own luxurious garment. An agony of remorse seized her.

“Oh God, where does he live? I must go to him.” She sobbed her prayer aloud, and stooped down, tenderly lifting the dirty manuscript, on the corner of which was written in pencil “G. A., 725 West 47th Street, if found please return, as it is my all.”

“You’ll be late for the theatre, Piccina, if you don’t get ready at once,” shrieked Madame R. through the door of her dressing-room, from which emanated a strong odor of geraniums.

CHAPTER XI.

THAT night as Ginnie left the theatre to step into her brougham, Lord Frost touched her on the arm. He had been waiting a long time for her, and she hardly recognized him, his face was so sunken and changed.

“I wanted to drive home with you to-night. I am going away to-morrow, and I would not ask such a favor of you except that I am in great distress, and I felt that you would let me have a few words with you.”

She was startled by his appearance.

“I am not going directly home, but am on my way to 725 West 47th Street, and if you care to come with me there and wait while I make my call, I will leave you at your hotel on my way home.”

“Thank you a thousand times, but may I ask who or what you expect to find there?”

He had seated himself in the brougham

beside her, and as he turned for her answer, the way she said "I am going to see a man" warned him from asking more questions. He then went on talking about his own affairs; his interview with Bernard, and told her pretty much about how things stood. Ginnie tried to listen with sympathy, but was impatient to reach her destination; eager to tell her father she was sorry she had hurt him. Of course, she would read his play, buy and produce it. How could she have wounded him after he had appealed to her mercy! The brougham stopped in front of a squalid tenement with the shutters half broken off on the ground floor and the window panes mended with newspaper on the upper stories. She could see it all dimly in the feeble street light. Ginnie wrapped her velvets close about her, climbed up the few steep steps and insisted on her escort waiting outside.

"But you cannot go into this awful place alone."

"Yes I can." And she did. She rang the bell and the hall door opened and

closed after her with a bang. She stood in utter darkness and felt her way to some door, upon which she pounded very hard. A woman's voice from inside called sleepily:

"Frank Frank, wake up, you old slob; don't you hear someone knocking? I guess it's the police caught you right enough now."

Frank refused to do as he was bid, and after much warm argument the woman opened the door on a crack, but wide enough for Ginnie to see the vision in an unbleached canton flannel nightgown, with pink china buttons down the front and hair in curl papers; all these glories brought to light by a tallow candle stuck in a bottle, held over her head. In her surprise at not finding the police she dropped the candle so low that one of the curl papers sizzled, which restored the woman's speech enough to enable her to exclaim with great emphasis:

"Holy gee!"

"Please forgive me for disturbing you at this hour of the night, but I wonder if

you could tell me which is Mr. Allerti's room. He is a poor Italian author who I know lives somewhere in this building." Her voice and manner were so gracious that the woman yawned and said:

"Oh, that's all right. Let me see, Allerti—Allerti, I guess he isn't turned out yet. To-morrow, I think they said, if he didn't pay his rent. Mrs. O'Rourke, upstairs; he shares the bed with Tommy. They sometimes take boarders in Tommy's bed. The other children are too big. Mrs. O'Rourke can tell you all about him, and she told me that she thought he pinched the sugar, although he was taken as a roomer with the distinct understanding he was not to be fed. She's had a terrible time with him—lazy—good Lord! She won't miss him after he's planted on the sidewalk. Here, take my candle or you'll break your neck on those stairs. You can leave it with me on your way down."

She handed the tallow out to Ginnie in its dirty bottle, and Ginnie thanked her gracefully and climbed another flight of stairs.

Mrs. O'Rourke was some time opening her door. She lit her own light first, and Ginnie could look within and see several small O'Rourkes sleeping in the kitchen, into which the hall door opened. When questioned about Mr. Allerti, and on being told where she got the information as to his whereabouts, Mrs. O'Rourke threw up her hands with a gesture of contempt:

"Oh, she's always lying! Why I've had regular boarders in Tommy's bed for over two months, two nice German boys. I wouldn't have an *I-tal-i-an*, not in one of our beds! I did have him do a little work for me, but I found him too lazy—too gentlemanly for me. The landlord has let him have a mattress in the cellar. He's a kind, good man, the landlord. He could have put him in the street, as I know for certain he hasn't got a cent. My, but he's thin! His whole body wouldn't flavor a bowl of soup."

"Well, could you kindly tell me where I can find his room? It is very important for me to see him at once."

“Well, go right down to the floor where you came in, and at the back of the hall there is a little staircase, and it’s the first door to the right.”

“Thank you.” Ginnie retraced her steps and eagerly sought the door of the trunk room. She did not knock. Her father lay face down on a mattress surrounded by a few dusty trunks, bits of furniture and rubbish. A small window opened into a court, and what little air there was came through its broken panes. Ginnie knelt down beside him and touched his hair tenderly.

“Father, Father, wake up! I came to tell you something.” She shook him gently. His eyes rolled vacantly, and soon he sat up staring at her.

“Father, I want to tell you that I will take your play and buy it, and act it, and make you famous. Do you understand?” He smiled feebly and she saw he understood only half of what she said. Then she laid a roll of bills in his emaciated hand, but it conveyed nothing to him. She fondled and petted him, and slowly

she felt he recognized her, and a look of faint pleasure came into his face, as she repeated over and over again what she had said before.

Presently he stretched out one hand and, taking hers, drew it towards him and, guiding it, made the sign of the cross on his forehead; then suddenly his head fell heavily back on her breast. There were a few moments of horrible struggle for life and breath, and Ginnie felt him slowly stiffen in her arms.

In the meantime it was cold and lonely waiting outside in the carriage, and Neil, growing impatient, went in to see if he could find Ginnie or be of service to her. The door closed, as before, with a bang, and the woman with the curl papers came out, afraid to miss any of this unexpected gaiety. She began a long monologue about the lady she guessed he was looking for, and said she had heard her come down again from Mrs. O'Rourke's room and go into the basement. She would bring another candle and help him find her if he would wait a moment, and

this offer Neil accepted gratefully. Presently she came out into the hall using her husband's shoes as bedroom slippers, a crazy-quilt modestly hiding part of her canton flannel nightgown. To lend a more dressy appearance, two of the curling papers had been undone but not combed out, the other two were reserved for the coquetry of the morning. She led the way down the passage. The trunk-room door stood open and within was a picture never to be forgotten.

"Lord-a-mercy!" ejaculated his guide. "If there isn't the parrot cage I've missed this three weeks." She sprang forward, lifting it from off the tin trunk. Neil smiled. All incongruity meant humor to him.

Ginnie's face was bowed and hidden against the dead man's hair. She did not notice either of them until Neil spoke. "I was anxious about you—forgive my intruding, but you cannot remain here. What hideous nightmare is this?"

She raised her face to his, and in so doing the lifeless head turned, and Neil

recognized the foreigner he had seen waiting outside the sitting-room at the Waldorf that afternoon.

"If it isn't the I-tal-i-an," gasped the woman.

"Some poor wretch who has starved to death, I suppose," said Neil.

"Starved to death!" echoed Ginnie in a voice that sounded as if it had risen from the tomb. "Starved to death—"

"Yes, I know the signs, but it is too painful for you here. Come away with me. You can be of no more use now."

Ginnie's whole frame quivered convulsively and, looking at each of them in turn, she said:

"Death lends dignity to all. It is my father; do you understand me? My father, that has died of hunger."

CHAPTER XII.

JANUARY is not a pleasant month in England for those who are not of a sporting turn of mind.

Lady Frost's dower house was far from being a cheerful spot. It had traces of once having been so, but, what with Neil's extravagance and her financial losses, the place was now ill-kept and dreary. Lady Frost was not a born housewife, and while she could run a perfect establishment with thirty servants, when it came down to six, who all thought they were too grand to be one of so few, she lived with but little comfort, though she clung to her style with that determination which characterizes so many English women. The footman, in shabby livery, counted the coals before putting them in the drawing-room grate. She kept a cook and a kitchen maid, and the half-drowned vegetables were eaten with the same relish by her hangers-on as of

old, only that there were not so many of either.

Neil had returned from America much depressed and worried over his financial losses, but determined to get what he could from Bernard's offer, at whatever loss of prestige it might entail. Lady Frost had brought back every sort of useless thing, from a teddy-bear up. She had no children and liked childish things.

Although the dower house was situated in the park at no great distance from the Castle, Lady Frost had not found her daughter-in-law as agreeable a companion as she had anticipated, and Vivien had soon discouraged her from interfering in her affairs. Neil was naturally not with his mother as much as formerly, though he always tried to see her whenever possible, as hers was the only sympathy and companionship now left to him. He had been married very soon after his father's death, and had taken up his new duties as a peer with much pomposity.

So now in the twilight of her life, Lady Frost's days were spent a good deal alone. She had tried to keep up her usual keen interest in politics and charity, but it chafed her to realize that she had no longer the social power her former position had given her, and which she had been unable to maintain through the force of her own personality. In the morning she attended to her outdoor duties, and in the afternoon she sat in the drawing-room window knitting. Time had not mellowed her stern features, but adversity, combined with that principle which had unconsciously guided her life, of taking all she could and giving as little as possible in return, had hardened the lines of her face and accentuated the expression of discontent which had always just spoiled her claims to beauty. Piqued by the loss of her position and irritated by Vivien's neglect, she had gradually grown to dislike her daughter-in-law, and hated to think that she might some day wear the jewels and laces that were so precious to her. This thought, combined with her

present anxieties, decided her to dispose of them all at a sale.

Strangely enough, Mrs. Van Ebens had remained the only friend who gave her any comfort. Muriel never forgot old people, and, besides, there had always been a certain sentiment about Neil's mother—which she might not have been able to retain, had she known her better. As often as she could she motored down to see her, bringing her all the news of the gay world in which she was now a conspicuous figure, and Lady Frost looked forward to these visits with pleasure and almost with gratitude. This dull afternoon in January, however, one came as a surprise. A motor puffed up to the door and Muriel stepped out with the Duke of Grantley. She looked pretty, even in motor clothes, and the grey in her hair was most becoming to her fresh face; Grantley, more serious than ever, but otherwise little changed. He liked none of that family, but all his friends seemed to be playing in the same sand-heap, and consequently they frequently met.

Muriel had brought the old lady a basket of grapes from her own greenhouse, and they all sat around the little table, more welcome than they had been in days gone by.

"Tell me all the gossip, now. This is a great treat. Has the great actress come that Neil and Vivien have told me so much about? Signorina—something. They met her in America?"

"Ginna? Oh, rather. Her great friend, Madame R., is with her and there is much excitement now because both are dining with me to-night, and I have come to beg you to motor up to London to meet them. You can stay with me; Vivien and Neil are coming too."

"You must be out of your mind, Muriel, to think of my going up to London to dine with anybody, at my age, let alone an actress. I am seventy years old. Do you realize that?"

Muriel looked at her with a woman's idea of well-bred surprise at any age.

"Madame R. is well over sixty, and the most charming person in the world.

They arrived yesterday from Paris, and I went to see them this morning. Neil said they wanted to meet me. They were to have dined with him, but I took the dinner over, and we expect it to be very amusing; not a function—only a few mutual friends, and you are particularly wished for—you and Bertie, by special request. Mr. and Mrs. Bernard came over from Paris with them. Such nice, kind people! You simply must come, Lady Frost, and sit on Mr. Bernard's right. It is good policy to be civil to these American millionaires, you know, and you may be doing Neil a good turn. Besides that, you have advertised your sale of laces and jewels, which, if well attended, should bring you a small fortune. These are rich women and could buy anything they wanted—and Neil tells me the younger one has diamonds that yours alone equal. Talk up your things a little to her. The Fitzmaurices are coming too, and you like them!"

The Duke laughed. "How odd to

hear two women talk; always to get something out of one another; even the nicest of them."

"Of course we do. What does anyone like anyone for, except to get something out of them—money, sympathy, brains, stimulus—or gossip—from the lowest to the highest. We must all put something in the pool of pleasure for society to draw from, or we will be left out in the cold."

"Taken into the cold you think preferable?"

"Bertie, you cynic, nonsense. You sneer at society because you were born in a certain position, and, as you must sneer at something, you sneer at your own world. As for me, I was not born in society, and I have many warm friends outside of it, and know all sorts and kinds of worlds in London—one of which only you belong to; and to lay down rules about any one set of people is as absurd as it is ignorant. There are heartless people out of society as well as in it; fools are of all classes—and

angels walk among us all, unnoticed, every day."

"Then you consider yourself a sort of missing link among them all?"

"Exactly; a capital name for me. Muriel, the missing link! But, seriously, La Ginna is prejudiced against English people, I hear, and it is our duty to change her views. She is a most fascinating person, and reminds me of something wild that has, with great difficulty, been tamed. In fact, I am not perfectly sure that she is tamed."

Bertie stretched his legs outward with an impatient jerk.

"From all I hear of this Circe's charms, I think I am the only man in England unsusceptible enough to meet her. I like all the ladies equally, and I have never seen the married man that I envied. You promise to place me between the two during that hour of nourishment?"

"Yes, I promise. We have one or two extra men that have begged to come, just to look at her. She has taken Paris

by storm. Off the stage she suggests nothing theatrical or even humorous. She has a rather sad, thin face, most seductive manners and an odd high voice, but not unmusical. She was much interested, Lady Frost, in your sale of valuables. I fancy she is a bit of a connoisseur. Mrs. Bernard is too delightful; so natural and kind. They are quite a happy family together '*a quatre*.' Come now, you must get ready to start with us at once, or we shall be late."

Lady Frost hemmed and hawed, but finally yielded to Muriel's entreaties, and left her two visitors to collect her things.

Bertie walked over to the window and looked out. "One often wonders what has happened to all the stupid people one has met in the world, who seem to just disappear."

"Are you talking for exercise or sense?" said Muriel sweetly, coming to stand beside him, and viewing the cheerless landscape.

"Both; and then I was thinking."

“Well, go on.”

“And I was thinking of the nice people that disappear. For instance that old lady always makes me think of Ginnie Allerti. I don’t blame her for running away; Lady Frost is—well, to me—perfectly poisonous.”

“I don’t think you ought to say so, having just swallowed her tea.”

“That was poisonous, too, and you know I didn’t want to come.”

“You are simply spoiled and ungrateful. You have had a divine motor drive with me all to yourself, you are going to have a beautiful time at dinner to-night, and—”

“Well, if she is dull I shall be bored, and if she appeals to me I shall probably never see her again. And that’s so tiresome.”

“Really, Bertie, you need some exercise. Your pessimism is most ridiculous in a man like you, who has everything to live for. You could marry almost any woman in England except me, and you are too lazy or shy ever to

try to see any one you like—and then you grumble.”

“I am a tiresome fellow. Now, there’s Reggie Grant; he couldn’t sleep for a week after Miss Allerti ran away, and now he’s been married twice, and is the father of a family; and I—never was in love with her, and never wanted to marry her, or any one else—yet all the women I compare with her fall flat. She has spoiled me for the others, that’s all.”

He played a tattoo on the window-pane.

“Why don’t you ask this woman to-night if she knows of her?”

“I mean to. She knew some actress in Italy or Paris, I forget who or where—it would interest me to know what had become of her. Perhaps she is married and fat and dull. If so I would rather not see her. For she was the most spiritual and elevating person I have ever met, not because of anything she said, but because of what one felt about her. I should hate to be disappointed.”

Lady Frost appeared and announced herself as ready, and so she was, for motor races or an Arctic Exploring Expedition.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was a few minutes past eight o'clock when the guests of honor arrived at Mrs. Van Ebens' house, but all were already assembled in the drawing-room waiting. There was Vivien, massive, pink and white, and old Lady Frost in regal velvet and diamonds, looking very grand and condescending. Lady Barr was there too, very little changed, unless for her curls, which were perhaps a shade brighter, and Lord Barr too, if possible a trifle duller. Reggie Grant and his second wife—a flirtatious little thing—were there, he, so changed that his own mother would hardly know him, but looking more than ever like a groom. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton Fitzmaurice were a real addition to the party, both improved in looks by happiness and prosperity. Her kindness of heart had softened her sharp features, and her husband's consideration and

appreciation of her many virtues had given her a charm and ease of manner that had won her many real friends. With them had come old Lowenstein, still very much alive, and long over the excitement of feeling himself in society and the habit of talking about the Prince of Wales. Muriel had taught him many things which are useful for a gentleman to know, and had suggested many other uses for his money than splurging. He proposed to her regularly every month, but never complained of the crumbs of friendship she threw him. Muriel's retinue of friends was varied, but whatever the relations of the members were to each other outside, around her fire-side they were all friends and perfectly at home.

Madame R., exquisitely dressed in purple, came first to greet her hostess; then Ginnie, wearing a look of triumph as she faced the room full of people. She wore a simple black gown, cut square at the neck, and her diamond chain sparkled below her knees, where

the jewelled ball hung heavily. Her skin was ashen, but her lips red with warm blood.

Lady Frost started and would have fallen as she recognized her, had she not clutched the mantel, beside which she was standing, for support. Had she not known the features, the diamond chain was unmistakable; the size and setting of the alternate stones she knew again, but the jewelled ball was strange to her. The look she alone had seen at her last interview, in which little Ginnie's face had seemed in an hour to have aged ten years, she knew again to-day.

Lady Frost was clever enough to know it would be fatal to betray her recognition, and besides, how useful Ginnie might now be to her if only she could be on friendly terms once more.

Everyone was introduced to the two strangers, and Bertie sat in clover between them, with Neil and Lady Barr on either side.

"It looks so different from—" began

Ginnie wistfully to the Duke, then she remembered she was meeting him for the first time.

“Different from what?” he asked, feeling some memory touched by her voice which he could not quite place.

“Different from Paris and New York. I like this dining-room. In America the decorations are more French. Americans haunt Paris, and I suppose are imbued with French tastes and fashions. All this heavy English style is quite new to me.”

“You don’t know London at all, then? I fancied I had met you somewhere before.”

“No, I was here as a child, but I made no friends. Mine is a different life and world, of work, work, work—and yours—”

“Mine is what?”

“One of play.”

“You are unjust. There are certain duties one has to live up to, however lazy one is.”

“And are you still lazy?”

She regretted the words immediately, but was relieved to see he had not noticed her slip, for he changed the subject.

"I once met a girl who, like you, said she loved to work. Did you ever hear of a Miss Allerti?"

Ginnie winced; and then looked the village idiot.

"Allerti is not a name I ever remember having heard of on the stage. You are thinking of the playwright."

"No, I'm not—though I have met him."

Ginnie's lips quivered, her eyes half closed as if she were in pain, and dropping her voice she asked beseechingly:

"Can you tell me how you came to know Allerti? What condition was he in when you knew him? How did a poor wretch like that ever happen to come into your life?"

Ginnie had not been guarded, and her expression was betraying the keen interest she felt. His eyes searched her face critically.

"All people who feel deeply have

their lives closely interwoven, whatever their class or condition. Don't you agree? He was a very clever man, remarkable enough not to be forgotten by any one who might meet him, however casually. My acquaintance with him was of the slightest. Forgive me for noticing your emotion just now—but you look to me as if you too had met him. Do you act any of his plays?"

"Next week in Paris I am to act in the last play he has written, a brilliant piece which ought to make him famous."

"I should like to see it. Will it make me cry or laugh?"

"Well, it is meant to make you laugh; but it may not."

"Fancy that poor fellow writing a comedy." Grantley looked off into space as if his thoughts were far, far away. "It is so difficult for me to account to myself for all the humorists and comedians and clowns who try to make us laugh. Where do they get their material for humor? Even supposing they have always been happy,

and certainly most of them have not, how do they escape seeing the loneliness and sorrow of others?"

"Perhaps it is from having felt loneliness and sorrow that—they wish to—change the subject. You cannot call humor a selfish thing. It gladdens thousands, under whatever conditions and circumstances it may have been borne."

"It seems almost impossible to think of your acting as being funny. You suggest nothing humorous."

She smiled bewitchingly.

"I don't believe the person lives who, having the power to make you laugh, has not equal power to draw your tears."

"I can't believe that."

"And I go farther," she went on; "the artist who can draw your tears must have the power to make you laugh. Take Mme. R. She is most amusing off the stage and is glorious in funny parts, only she loves the classics. I prefer life of to-day, nonsense, mirth. I have cried enough." She shook her head as if to free herself from haunting

thoughts. Her thin eyelids drooped slightly and trembled. She began to be afraid of herself, afraid he would recollect her old personality of youth. He seemed to be thinking all the time, as he studied her, where he had seen her before. She felt it and went on hurriedly:

"I have been taught to laugh by balancing my joys with my sorrows, and learning to cherish each pleasure or thought that lightened a care or a worry—treasure it as a priceless jewel, nurse it, exaggerate it—and so we comedienues make profit by night out of the tears we have shed by day; sifting all we feel and see, and giving to the public."

"Oblivion of life as it really is?"

"I was not going to say that, but perhaps your ending to my sentence is better than my own would have been."

"Can't I see you to-morrow? I'll take you to the Zoo," he said irrelevantly.

"In what capacity?"

Both laughed.

"Life is indeed made up of good-byes," she said. "We go back to Paris to-morrow. I must rehearse my new play, which begins next week. I must make it the success of my life. Perhaps if you came the first night, it would be!" She bent her head forward and looked up at him with her enchanting smile.

"With all the pleasure in the world. I speak now for the right-hand box next the stage, and shall cable for it in the morning. I do hope I will not be disappointed in you as an actress."

"Would you mind very much as long as you were not disappointed in me as a woman?"

"Yes, I should mind very much, because I think you have a divine spark of something, which must mean your art."

"We actresses should never talk about ourselves, remember; and now I was about to make a thoroughly commonplace remark, which I think I shall spare you."

"Very well. But if I can't take you

to the Zoo, may I come to see you in the morning before you start for France?"

"Yes, by all means. Promise not to be shocked and breakfast with us, as we are Bohemians—at nine o'clock."

She hardly thought he would accept, but he did.

The dinner was nearly over before Neil had a chance to get in a word. He was jealous and sullen. Ginnie played with him like a cat with a mouse. It was a glorious feeling to be sure of herself. She was thankful she was not his wife, grateful she had been obliged to work for her bread and butter, and had not been allowed to get cynical and jealous and idle as she reached middle age. There was no telling how much longer she would have teased him, as Muriel at that moment made the move to leave the men with their cigars, and Lady Frost led the procession upstairs to the drawing-room. Very little was changed there beyond the fresh grey on the walls.

Lady Frost put up her glasses to look

at a new photograph of the King in a rhinestone frame which stood on the piano, and then turned amiably to Ginnie, and started to tell her about the sale of her things which was to take place the following afternoon; she hoped so much to see her there, and that she would bring Mrs. Bernard and Mme. R. She included them in an inviting way, and went on to tell of her pink pearls, two tiaras, a diamond dog-collar and a host of smaller things; but the laces were her particular treasures. Her eyes were fastened on Mme. R.'s exquisite lace and velvet gown, as handsome as anything she had to offer to the public, and of a different style.

"You would be particularly interested in the lace, I am sure." She sat down with an elegant sweep of the hand in the other's direction, and was not a little surprised to hear her reply as she also seated herself.

"No, I wouldn't. I hate lace. I only wear this because it is expensive, and I think old people look better and

more dignified in expensive things. But I wouldn't buy any more, because this will last me until I die, and then my friends can raffle for it to pay for the burial."

Lady Frost winced. Mme. R. was in one of her bad humors. She hated the London fog, always had hated the people, was bored at Neil's hanging about and fawning at their feet since their arrival, but most of all she hated Lady Frost's face. Her respectability, without a trace of principle or honor, was written as clearly as if it had been advertised with electric letters. She thought her a snob and a time-server, and took pains to say so to Lord Barr, who led her in to dinner; and as the women entered the drawing-room she whispered to Ginnie: "Don't let her borrow money from you. I'd rather eat it." Usually so gracious and charming, she was a new person to-night. All were a little afraid of her. She drew Lady Frost on about her views on morals and gambling, and what she felt should or

should not be tolerated in society, then made the startling announcement that she herself was everything not fit to be received, and added that Piccina was probably the only really virtuous woman in the room. Ginnie grew very red. Vivien and Muriel tried their best to turn the conversation into pleasanter channels, but the former only annoyed her more than ever. At last Ginnie, with all the warmth and strength of her own sweet nature, leaned forward and kissed her before them all. The angry wrinkles softened at once.

“Madame R. keeps me in fits of laughter all day long, but one has to get used to her, or one would fancy she was cross—eh?” and she pressed her dear friend’s hand lovingly, and drew the attention to herself, gradually getting Lady Frost to concentrate all her attention on her, much against that lady’s will. The others separated into groups. Mme. R. was happy alone with Muriel, while Vivien and the bride found endless pleasure in the sort of conversation

that makes dull women talk and giggle in undertones, whatever it is. The dining-room doors had been thrown open, and the men's voices were heard in the hall. Ginnie lifted the diamond chain from off her own neck.

"I am indeed sorry not to be able to be at your sale to-morrow afternoon, Lady Frost. I love beautiful things, and should have been glad to have done a little toward swelling the fund you are trying to raise, but as I cannot be there—I must be in Paris for my rehearsals—I beg of you to accept this as a contribution from me. Sell it for what it is worth; I have never questioned its value, and until to-night, cared but little that it might represent a large sum." She laid her chain quickly over Lady Frost's head, and it fell rippling in liquid sparkles in a curling mass into her lap, the jewelled ball half smothered in the gems.

Lady Frost was a woman of rigid self-control, but she had been through an ordeal to-night dreadful for one of

even her age and temperament. She knew Muriel was unconscious of what she had done, and she guessed her son did not suspect Ginnie's identity. She might not herself, had it not been for the necklace, for between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five a woman changes much. Lady Frost was stunned. She turned deathly pale and was seized with terror lest Ginnie should expose her. She guessed Mme. R. knew everything there was to know; but little Ginnie, who she thought by now would have passed and been forgotten on the Boulevards—little Ginnie was a great artist, a great power; and she would bide her chance, and give her still another mortification; she had had plenty of late; but the most awful was to come, that she felt sure of, and yet on Ginnie's face she could see no trace of malice. Neil and the Duke now stood before them. Neil's eyes fastened on the diamonds on his mother's neck—and the jewelled ball.

“What does this mean? Is not this your diamond chain, Mother, that you used to wear so much?”

“Lady Frost answered with difficulty, “Signorina Ginna has generously made me a present of this—to help my distress—I—I—am quite overcome.”

“But, Mother, you can’t!” cried Neil. “You can’t take it! Shame! Why! it must be Ginnie, little Ginnie—whom you turned into the street—speak—be honest! Did you give her this, then, to bribe her silence? Horrible! Horrible!” He brushed his hand over his bloodshot eyes, and looked at his mother with contempt and loathing. The coward in him revolted at the revelation of the woman who had borne him, who had helped to make him. Lady Frost recoiled in her chair as if she had been struck, her head quivering, and her thin fingers playing with the diamonds, caressing them, tenacious of them at all costs.

There was a cruel pause, very short; and Ginnie rose, as if she were behind the footlights. The others seemed only to her as an audience, and in her strange, wonderful voice she began:

“My dear friends, I beg you will forgive his lordship for having enjoyed too good a dinner. I sometimes think we like people because of their infirmities. As to the chain—when I left Lady Frost’s roof so long ago as Ginnie Alerti, she was kind enough to give it to me as a good-bye present, and I have worn it all these years, and now that we meet again it is with the deepest gratitude for all her past kindness to me, that I place upon her—the diamond chain. I wanted to see again those faces whom I have looked back upon with memories of happiness, and you will forgive me for not having made myself known. I was not born, like you all, among cushions and laces, and I am a wanderer. It brings tears to my eyes to feel all your kindness and appreciation of Mme. R. and myself to-night, and I beg you will ask no questions of my aunt, Lady Frost. Like Undina—I must come and go unquestioned. Promise me this and I say—let us meet again.”

She paused and laid one hand on her aunt's shaking shoulder, glancing at the Duke and Fitzmaurice successively. Both murmured, "We promise."

"I only ask you, Lady Frost, to give me back my little jewelled ball that hangs on the chain. There is someone looking for it and I must help him find it. Will you take it off for me, Neil?"

He had almost lost his self-control, and his lips and nostrils were quivering. He kneeled down and unfastened it, handing it to Ginnie with bowed head. Vivien's commonplace voice broke the spell:

"I think we had better go home, Neil. You don't seem quite yourself."

"Thank God for that, if only once!" he answered doggedly in an undertone.

The party seemed to be breaking up and Muriel came as near being flustered as she had ever been in her life. There was something very mysterious about the evening, and she could not make out whether to put it down to one of her successes or one of her failures. Lady

Frost looked as if she were ready to faint at any moment, so Ginnie said good-night, kissing her hostess, who promised to come to Paris the following week to see her new play. She was to make up a little party of Ginnie's friends in days gone by, and Ginnie wondered how many there would be.

CHAPTER XIV.

“GOSH, what a play that would make! Both cowards now clinging to their former prey. Ain’t they beauties?”

He shook his head, balancing, with great care, his right heel on his left toe, after stretching his short legs as far as he could. The words were Mr. Samuel Bernard’s. All had returned to the hotel to Madame R.’s apartments to discuss the events of the evening. The latter was in a better humor, and had been enlightening Mr. and Mrs. Bernard on the meaning of the scene they had just witnessed. She had told them how Ginnie’s relatives had behaved to her seventeen long years ago. Suddenly a loud knock came at the door, and Lord Frost entered. Ginnie was almost asleep on the sofa and started at the sound. He stood for a moment in the doorway looking at her, and then said abruptly:

“Forgive me for coming at this hour, but I felt I might go mad at any moment if I didn’t speak, and I have a few words to say before you all. You won’t refuse me, will you?” He looked pleadingly at Ginnie.

“Of course, Neil. Sit down and stay as long as you like. Help yourself to a cigarette. You will find my box on the table.”

“Come over to me,” said Bernard, “and have a whiskey and soda. It will smooth your hair down.” He poured one out for Neil and another for himself.

“I did not expect to find you here, Mr. Bernard. I had not hoped for such good fortune, and was about to send you a telegram asking to see you to-morrow night.”

“Didn’t expect to find me here, eh? Well, I’m here until to-morrow evening, when I go to Paris to join the ladies and see the great opening night. To-morrow morning I shall be busy seeing these people off, who start ahead of me, but by lunch time I shall be free if you

will meet me here, say, at two o'clock, and we can have a quiet chat. As for me, I'm out for a holiday. I see enough of men all day in Wall Street, and when I am off for a spree, I try to make myself the ladies' pet, and put up with dressmakers, shampooers and manicurers. Nothing phases me, and I hang round until I'm put out—growing brighter and brighter as the night wears away. Don't I, Mrs. Bernard?"

She glanced up at her husband with an indulgent smile, for there were times in America when his expression was as hard as steel.

Neil's face looked grey and his tall figure wilted.

"Ginnie, I want to apologize to you, in the presence of all these three true friends of yours, for having been the cad I was to-night, as well as in years gone by. I have no excuse to offer, except that I seem to have been born and bred a cad. To-night I nearly killed my mother, quite unconsciously; and until you awakened a faint some-

thing in me by your defence of the situation I had created, I did not realize my own baseness. I used to think I was bad, but I am not bad enough not to know it, and have it depress me; a miserable condition, and you must know that I am not a happy man. The jewelled ball was tossed too high to be found, but on my hands and knees, in the darkness, I mean to grope through the swamps till I get it. The jewels may have been plucked out by another, but the jewelled ball—the ball will be mine—mine.”

He stopped and looked about him until his eyes met Ginnie's. She was deadly pale, but the tenderness in her face convinced him that she understood—and that she would help him.

“He must have been drinking very heavily,” whispered Mrs. Bernard to Mme. R. Mr. Bernard eyed him suspiciously for a moment, then said:

“You have gone up eight points in my estimation, my man,” and slapped him approvingly on the back; “you have got

enough that is not rotten in you to make it worth while cutting the rottenness out. There'll be enough good left for the pie yet; you see if there isn't; that is if you are in earnest. I hope it isn't liquor that is giving you these noble sentiments. Now, don't forget to lunch with me to-morrow, and ladies, good-night. It is time for me to do up my wife's curl papers, and I will leave you."

The Bernards left the room, and Madame R. also excused herself, pleading fatigue and leaving Ginnie alone with Neil. He threw himself wearily into a chair near her and cried like a child. She walked over beside him and laid her cool hand on his head until he became calmer. Neil raised his face and looked gratefully up at her.

"You don't begin to know all that I have done dishonorably, but I mean to undo what I can. I shall see Bernard to-morrow. I don't want to be ashamed to meet decent people. Do you know, to-night something broke within me—it was what you did—your goodness.

Ginnie—Ginnie, what must you have thought of me in New York when, like the coward that I was, I told you about the past; when I misrepresented your character and my feeling, simply to pretend I had never cared for anyone before? You never deceived me one moment, years ago. I knew just what I was doing, and then, when you grew fond of me, I got frightened at the thought of marrying you. I was afraid of the world's ridicule, and afraid of your father becoming troublesome. You don't know what a terror I have of being laughed at—and Mother promised to get me out of it all—and I let her." He bowed his head, choking down his sobs, as he went on:

"I was very fond of Muriel Van Ebens before that, but my fear of ridicule kept me from marrying her, because she was older. Now, to-day, she looks ten years younger than I do. She cared for me and had every right to expect me to marry her. I—I promised her before her husband died." He felt a hot tear

fall on his forehead. She wiped it quickly away.

“I have lied, cringed and skulked through life. I never believed it was possible for a man to love a woman as much as I love you, or in the way I love you, since I met you in New York. I express myself awkwardly, but your strength is so wonderful, the power you have over me frightens me.”

He shook with passionate, uncontrollable sobs after his confession, Ginnie still silently pressing her hand on his burning forehead. Gradually he grew quieter, a subtle peace stealing into his swollen veins—the first earnestness of his soul was born.

The clock struck one. It was a hideous clock, with uncovered figures that might better have been clothed, holding it up on their brazen shoulders. Both Ginnie and Neil looked at it simultaneously.

“We shall see you in Paris next week, I hope; the first night of my poor father’s play, and I mean to make him famous.”

"As always, your thought is for others. Yes, I shall come. It is good of you to allow me."

"I am glad you will come. The play is not long but very wonderful, I think, and I hope, I hope it will make you laugh."

The sitting-room door was boisterously thrown open and Vivien stood before them, livid with fury under her paint and powder.

"You're here, I see. I knew it instinctively. Pretty time of night for you to have a 'business' engagement, as you told me on your doorstep. Is this where you came to make money?"

She sneered, showing all her latent ugliness; a careless thing for any lady to do who poses as a professional beauty. Ginnie looked at her in mute wonder. In an instant Neil's whole face changed. This woman seemed to bring out only what was sordid and low in him. It was in this mood that he had first kissed her and with this feeling he had married her, and now that she had been some

years his own chattel, she was still nearer the earth. For this he was as much to blame as she, with his idealless and selfish existence for them both. Perhaps there was not much that was fine to bring out in her, but there are men like Neil who deliberately prostitute their wives and who mentally and physically degrade their women.

"This is the swamp I have to struggle through," he said, rising and shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, and a hard struggle it will be," retorted Vivien sharply, missing the point as usual. "I suppose you know Miss—Miss Alligator, that I could sue Neil for divorce, and name you as co-respondent. I have been listening at the keyhole."

"I know so little about law," answered Ginnie sweetly, determined to calm this massive animal before she took Neil off.

"Too good to be true. Divorce—glorious—heaven—" put in Neil, with an ugly laugh. His wife shrieked and flung herself on the lounge, beating her clenched hands against it in her rage.

"Let her alone," said Neil, as Ginnie was about to kneel down beside her, in the hopes of explaining matters. "Let her alone. She is full of tricks and this is the way she always carries on when she wants jewels or furs or anything particularly. She fooled me once or twice, but never again. She will get tired in a moment." He lit a cigarette, put on his overcoat leisurely and lifted his hat and cane. The screams had stopped; there were one or two last feeble struggles, and Vivien sat up and stared about her, evidently calmer but not looking dignified.

"Get up and come home." Neil spoke in a voice of authority. She rose at once. "Now, say good-night to Ginnie and ask her to forgive your fit of unpardonable temper." Ginnie did not wait for an answer, but went forward to her with both hands outstretched.

"I am so sorry you were not well, Lady Frost, and I hope you will recover enough to come next week to Paris with all our mutual friends."

Vivien clutched at the straw.

“The fact is, I am not well. We have been under a great nervous strain and I get quite dizzy and off my head at times.” They shook hands amicably. Neil bowed very low to Ginnie as he stood back to let his wife pass first through the door he held open for her.

CHAPTER XV.

“ I ’VE got a table at the far end of the room where we can talk quietly, and I have ordered lunch. What will you drink ? ”

“ Nothing, thanks. I have slept badly and have a headache, but I have much to say to you, and I want to get it over. Since I left America I have thought of nothing but that undertaking about the West African Development Company, and last night I made up my mind to pay you back the money I lost, and to refuse to carry out the agreement. I knew at the time it was dishonest and criminal. I don’t blame you or your friends who made me the offer. They have something to gain and are willing to pay for it, and from their point of view it is a plain business transaction, and had it not been for last night I would have stuck to my promise and carried out my side of the bargain. As it is I refuse, and here’s my

cheque for the money they paid the brokers, and my agreement with them for the balance. I have raised the money, and I am quitting politics, and we shall shortly shut up the house and go abroad."

Neil had unfolded his pocket-book and laid the papers in front of Mr. Bernard, who was busy with his lunch and for once in his life betrayed signs of confusion and amusement. He really felt ashamed of himself. At his age, too, to have played such a practical joke, and for his pains to have Wall Street thrown in his teeth. He steadied himself with a glass of wine, and dropping back into his business manner he said:

"So you want to break your agreement?"

"I have broken it, and there is your money, and I want my letter back in return."

"You can't have it."

"Why not?"

"Because I burned it."

"Burned it? What do you mean?" gasped Neil.

“What I say; allow me, Lord Frost, to introduce you to the President, Secretary, Shareholders and Office Boy of the West African Development Company.” He half rose in his chair and bowed gravely to Neil across the table. Neil jumped up from his seat in amazement. He was beside himself with anger.

“Good god!” he said, “you fooled me, played with me and insulted me, made me dishonor myself with a hoax?” He spoke so loud that the waiters looked up and people turned in their chairs to look at him.

“Sit down,” said Bernard, in a tone that sobered him as it had sobered many who had lost their tempers at one time and another in the course of his long business career. “Yes, I hoaxed you, and I shall not apologize. Sit down and try and calm yourself. I like you better for what you have said to-day, and I think what happened last night has begun to make a man of you. As to your cheque I shall take it, as it was I who paid the brokers, and as to your loss, why, I think you deserve it and it will do you good.”

“Well, and what were your reasons?” asked Neil, sullenly. He was very angry, though he was trying hard to check his excitement and the shame which showed in his face. Perhaps he felt the humiliation of the trick more keenly than the dishonesty he had been guilty of, and although he guessed it might have been Mme. R. who had prompted all this, he still felt the keenest resentment for the man who had made a fool of him as well as a knave.

“Lord Frost, we learn in the course of business training in America to say little of the motives and reasons for our actions, and I must leave you to supply the answer to your own question.”

“But it was none of your business, my acquaintance with—er—er—Miss Allerti, and what did you know of it before last night?”

Mr. Samuel Bernard had made an excellent lunch. Neil had hardly touched his and sat sullenly rolling his bread and smoking cigarette after cigarette. Presently a man walked over from a table at

the other side of the room, and the Duke of Grantley sat down between them. He was in the best of spirits, and shook hands cordially with Bernard and nodded pleasantly to Neil, who scarcely looked up.

"I was very glad to see you across the room, Mr. Bernard, and even though we are to meet again in Paris so soon, I could not resist the temptation of joining you, and I was thinking how nice it would be if we could cross over together to-morrow night. I have not felt so cheerful or so light-hearted for years, and you can't think how I am looking forward to my little trip to Paris. By-the-way, Neil, it surely is not true, the rumor I heard this morning, that you intended to leave the House at the end of the session? I told Renfrew that I felt sure there could be no truth in it."

"Yes, I am going to give it up. I have lost rather heavily lately and I've got to retrench, as Bernard here knows. I disregarded his advice and lost all I made in New York, and more besides. I don't care so much now—since last night I mean."

“You don’t mean it? I’m sorry, Neil. If I could be of any use—to tide you over temporarily, I mean—” He had never liked Neil, and made no bones about it; but Grantley had never heard of any one’s misfortune without a feeling of sympathy and the desire to help. He was forever doing kindly actions and without the least ostentation. He was well off and had inexpensive tastes, and always found a use for what he had to spare that brought happiness to others whose share of that blessing was less than his own.

Last night at Mrs. Van Ebens’ dinner he had felt as soon as he entered the house that he was starting on a new era of his life, though he could not have told the reason. He had not recognized Ginnie, though he had been half conscious of a dim feeling of recollection of her personality, and when at last her identity was revealed he was to some extent prepared for it. All his thoughts rushed back seventeen years to the days when she had made so much impression on him, and now that he saw her a woman he felt her

attraction tenfold, and realized in an instant that he would require to see but little of her to fall in love for the first time in his life; and what was more, he must see her. He sat talking to Muriel Van Ebens after the party had broken up. He had made no effort to hide his admiration for Ginnie, and listened patiently to the good-humored chaff of his confidante.

"How have the mighty fallen!" she had said laughingly, and he was obliged to confess he was perilously near it himself. That night he had made up his mind and with quiet determination had already set about the carrying out of his purpose. Neil had made no reply to Grantley's offer, but sat smoking sullenly. Bernard answered for him.

"No, if he takes my advice he will strike out for himself and profit by the lesson he has had. Learn to take your losses, I say, as I had to take many in my time."

"Well, I must go," said Grantley, "and listen to a little lecture at the Royal Institute, and I am sure it will be a prof-

itable way of spending the afternoon. Good-bye, Mr. Bernard, till to-morrow evening. I will reserve a compartment on the 8 o'clock train."

CHAPTER XVI.

MME. R.'S apartment in Paris was a haven of rest and cheer; the atmosphere of a room where one only sees people whom one really wants to see, had permeated the walls and furniture. Everything in it was real—no imitations of periods, lace or tapestries. No bore had ever desecrated her sanctuary—although she had sometimes enlivened the abode of bores! She had a separate room for people in need of her—but this room was for those that were welcomed with outstretched arms. How few people understand the art of welcome! What a power it is, that seems to permeate some rooms, some clothes even, and is suggested by some perfumes—welcome! Ginnie could not forget her first wonderful welcome here, and had grown to love this apartment almost as much as the owner.

Outside it was raw and foggy—but

the fire-light radiated such warmth the poor fog had no chance at all in the room which allowed no bores. Ginnie re-arranged the divan cushions two or three times. Grantley was tall—he stooped a little, consequently he would like the biggest cushion a little further down—or up—she stood pondering and could not decide—her mind wandered from the cushions. Grantley was coming all the way to Paris to see her present her father's play—Grantley had befriended her in England, after her flight years ago—Grantley so full of sympathy, so unspoiled and simple—so serious in his sense of duty and obligations to his fellow-creatures. How few men were like him! A sort of ideal of aristocracy he was to her. Different from the aristocracy she had known more intimately. Was she in love with him in the ripeness of her womanhood, with the full appreciation that an early sorrow gives a noble nature? She shook the thought from her with a toss of her head, and again began to fix the cushions—pounding

them into a comfortable angle for her visitor—who was five minutes late. How can men be so unpunctual! she thought. Paris has so many attractions for Englishmen, however. This was her hour for rest—five o'clock. She had no business to say he could come—that she was willing to acknowledge to herself. The rest of the party she was not to see until after the play, at Grantley's supper.

She heard him announced, and held both hands out toward him.

"How deliciously un-British!" He laughed, holding hers for a second in his, then, "I suppose you know the house has been sold out since early this morning? Boxes are filled with royalties."

She shrugged her shoulders and said: "I am so glad to see you."

He flushed with pleasure and unconsciously flung himself into the delicious mass of cushions she had so carefully prepared for him. Ginnie took a low chair near him. She was very pale and nervous. Wildly ambitious for the success of her father's play, her own phenomenal success

gave her little thought. She had won what she had worked for, and the glory of it all had been laid gratefully at Mme. R.'s feet, but to-night it was different—to-night Allerti must be made famous.

The Duke looked about him admiringly. "What a little paradise this is, even nicer than I expected! What a wonderful thing genius is, it permeates a woman's voice, dress, friends, furniture—even the sofa cushions! I am distinctly happy—distinctly happy," he repeated.

Ginnie stretched out her supple figure, resting a velvet slipper on the fender without answering.

"Do you wonder why I came to Paris?" He did not look toward her with his question.

"Why, to see me, of course," she answered simply, in that strangely spiritual voice that always seemed to take him straight away from the everyday world.

It was not an answer he expected, but a question, so he only murmured "Exactly."

They did not speak for some minutes, then she turned slowly and looked at him. The fire-light fell straight across him—but his face was shaded by one hand. With the other he toyed with a gold locket on his watch-chain—lovingly. It must enclose something dear to him. The first pang of jealousy was born in her, then her hot imagination ran riot. He had probably come to see her to ask her to be a sister to him. He was just the sort of man who would worship and idealize her—and give his human love to some other. She tried to fool herself into thinking she did not care—but Ginnie was one of those rare women, who was honest with herself, and for an instant she was blind with pain. She could not bear it if he were to ask her to be kind to another woman whom he loved better than anyone in the world. Ginnie was very human, she did not wish to be worshipped. This she longed to shew him. How could she tell him? With a sudden caprice she pushed back her chair and jumped up before him—

close to the warm glow, with both arms outstretched like a restless grey-bird with pinions spread to fly. The grey transparent folds of her tea-gown shivered and clung closer, from the sudden movement.

Grantley looked bewildered—full of emotion, he could not speak. “I don’t want you to worship me,” she faltered, moving a trifle closer to him and enjoying the look of pain that spread over his serious face.

“Why do you look so glum? It bores me. Mine is a light nature; I like to dance and be gay—and not go too deeply into things. You are, I fear, sentimental.”

Her eyes rested on the gold locket. The Duke put his hand over his eyes, as if to hide them from her—and her from them. His deep love for her had grown slowly, without faltering, for fifteen years. He had come to Paris determined to make her his wife. Suddenly he felt as if he did not know her any more. He could not have believed

Ginnie capable of so paltry a feeling as jealousy, or any smallness of nature. How little he knew womankind! She smiled archly down upon him, her eyes and lips like accomplices playing into each other's power and worrying him as he had never been worried before.

"You seem restless," he said with an effort. She laughed softly. "I am bursting with mischief, happiness, the glories of life, and joy at your presence."

"My presence!" He rose to a sitting posture. "My presence, how nice of you!"

Ginnie's face suddenly grew serious. "Would you like me to do a dance for you that I do to-night. The fever is in my bones—I must dance. I suppose you never felt like that." She felt sorry for him when he shook his head, and went on in her caressing voice: "Well, I feel like that sometimes—hungry for motion—as for beauty of form and color and soul."

"I have felt hungry for beauty of soul—and been satisfied."

Her eyes closed, and he saw the transparent lids quiver. "Then you must love the other—form and color—perhaps I can teach you," she added in a voice so low he could hardly hear.

"Perhaps," he repeated, covering his face with his hands.

She watched him silently until he looked up at her again with his troubled gaze. "I will dance for you—my dance of twilight—the fire-light will have to do, and you must imagine the harps playing the accompaniment, nothing else. It is supposed to be the chasing of the shadows, one after another at dusk, until the last, lost in the world's darkness, is caught in the embrace of the moon, as the curtain drops. If you have the imagination—you will like it, I hope. Have you?"

"I am sure I don't know. I am rather bewildered; I don't think I feel very well, but I love to see you move." He sank back again among the cushions, his eyes fixed on Ginnie, as she began.

The masses of grey chiffon and tulle which swathed her rose with her graceful, half-bared arms, slim and round, and fell trembling and shivering in their own soft shadows. She crouched to the ground, then rose like a reed, swaying in perfect harmony with each member of her graceful body, her shell-like palms stretched upwards toward him. The dance was slow and weird. She sang her own music softly, gliding about the room and gradually drawing closer and closer to her companion, until at last, seized with an impulse she could not resist, she threw herself suddenly from the waist backward, her arms folded across her breast, and kissed him on the forehead. It was only for a second. He tried to catch her in his arms but she slipped beyond his reach, and, as they both looked up, there in the doorway stood Neil.

"I knocked but you did not hear—I fear I am not wanted." He was shocked and jealous at what he had seen, and his tone betrayed him.

"Come in; do." The Duke rose. "You must promise not to tell what you have seen. Can you keep a secret, Neil?"

"You mean, not to tell that I saw Ginnie kiss you?" Neil's voice was hard, almost sneering. The other longed to kick him out, but seeing Ginnie standing there helpless and dumb, her appealing eyes turned towards him as much as to say: "What must you both think of me? You will understand, but he won't," he merely said:

"Don't give us away until I tell you. Perhaps to-night at the supper we will announce our engagement, and perhaps not until later; whenever Ginnie chooses, but I belong to her absolutely, and mean one day to make her my wife."

Ginnie's pale face turned crimson and she dropped her eyes. Neil came across to her.

"Cousin Ginnie, I believe he is worthy of you." He raised the tips of her fingers to his lips. "As for Bertie, he is the luckiest man in the world." The

struggle for his better self had conquered.

Madame R. came in and nearly fell in the dark.

“What horrors are you all committing that makes you afraid of a little light? Fie, fie, it is high time I came.”

She turned on a switch near the door, and all stood blinking in the sudden glare.

“Go to bed, Ginnie, at once, and take forty winks. You will look a fright to-night. Duke, go home, I tell you, and, Lord Frost, what on earth did you come for at all? Ginnie should not open her mouth before night.”

The old actress was entirely dressed for the theatre. Neil stammered an excuse and in a few moments he and Madame R. were side by side on the sofa, talking with animation, and Ginnie and Bertie were left to look into each other's eyes unnoticed. Her first feeling of gratitude had given place to a keen resentment of his effrontery. His face wore a look she had not seen be-

fore. The jaw was set and his direct grey eyes had lost their wounded look and had grown hard and determined. He was tired of being played with.

"How dared you?" she said half aloud.

"What else could I do to save you from your own bit of deviltry?"

"Oh, it was done to save me!" He felt distinctly elated at her tone of pique.

"Pray don't misunderstand my obligations as a gentleman." He bowed very low. She tried to smile mockingly, but all her art of acting seemed suddenly to have died away. He drew still closer to her, and, in an undertone, said:

"If you ever feel you would like to leave the stage and take a quiet, respectable husband and bury yourself in the country—and change your moods and temper, I may consider the suggestion on your part—and marry you."

Ginnie gasped.

"How horribly dull! I couldn't—I wouldn't; not unless I make the most awful failure of this play to-night. No-

body living could induce me to leave the stage. You are so insolent that I forgive you only because, because—I honestly believe you are trying to be funny.” She gave him a side-long glance.

“Heaven forbid—heaven forbid that I should be accused of having humor, the most tiresome of all qualities. I look on laughter merely as exercise. But one thing makes me able to forgive you, Ginnie—no, to be honest, two things. First, you are nervous and tired. Second, you are jealous of the locket I carry on my chain, and third, I forgot; three things make me forgive you; Third, I love you.”

He did not stop to say good-bye to Madame R.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN the play was done, Ginnie felt she had reached the zenith of her career. She was called before the curtain many times—cheered—whistled at, and Allerti's name was on everyone's lips. She was indeed famous now. She cried tears of gratitude at her last curtain call, as the stalls began to empty, and in a broken voice thanked her public for their sympathy and appreciation.

The guests had all assembled in the private room Grantley had engaged before Ginnie arrived. She looked very worn and nervous, and could hardly control her tears, touched as she was by her friends crowding about her, and rejoicing with her in her success. Grantley was in great spirits. Neil had broken his reverie in the afternoon—and in its breaking, with a sudden joy and mental intuition, he felt Ginnie's mood had all

been caused by jealousy of the locket. It amused him. He felt a pleasure in feeling that he now had the upper hand—if he was tactful.

Ginnie sat on his right, very still, Mrs. Bernard on his left. The *tzganes* played sometimes as if possessed of forty devils; and sometimes as if led by the angels. The leader kept his wild black eyes fixed on the guest of the evening, for she, evidently, was enjoying the music more than any of them.

Grantley said: "Don't bother to talk to me. You are so tired, you might say something you would regret later." She turned surprised eyes on him. "And you?"

"I am not moody; mine is cold-blooded disagreeableness."

"Your inference is not calculated to turn my head," she answered wearily, longing to tell him she was sorry she had been horrid and to confess her jealousy. He seemed like a strong, beautiful rock beside her, on which the lash of life and storms made but insignificant marks.

The afternoon and evening had used up all her vitality, and nothing was left in her but the immortal spirit—the intangible—which alone holds one, however little he or she may know it. He seemed very near to her in her present mood.

He began in his strong, gentle voice: “I want to tell you about that locket which I think you admired this afternoon.”

“Do. It would interest me enormously.”

“This year at Leghorn my cab ran over a poor Italian wretch. It did not hurt him badly, but I took him to his lodgings and went to see him two or three times until he was well. We got to be rather friendly—and he asked me to buy this locket which contained the picture of his dead wife. He wanted to sell it, to obtain money to go to America to find his daughter. He was suffering from some incurable malady, and was extremely anxious to see her before he died.”

Ginnie was all eagerness. She leaned closely to him with parted lips, impatient for the rest of the narrative.

“Well, go on. Go on!” she cried.

“It seems his daughter was an actress and of course he thought her great. Any father would. He had been working for years on some play to give her, but he told me very little about it. He had sold nearly everything he had ever possessed, and this gold locket was the only thing of value he had left in the world. I was struck with the peculiar beauty of the face and the workmanship of the locket, and bought it for a sum that seemed a small fortune to him. There is more courage about the face than any picture I have ever seen, and somehow it reminds me of you.” He turned just in time to catch Ginnie in his arms as she fainted.

The windows were all thrown open, and in an instant almost she opened her eyes. The buzz of voices had subsided momentarily, only to rise again more loudly, and the *tzganes* played on their wild music

that now made Ginnie's brain feel as if flames were leaping up into it.

"Let me see! Let me see! Could it be possible?" She stretched her shaking hand toward him and took from him the golden locket. She opened it with trembling fingers and saw the picture of her mother as a girl, the only one of her she had ever seen. The tears blinded her eyes.

"It's my mother," she murmured without looking up from the picture, "my precious mother! And so it is owing to you that my father came to America and saw me before he died, and owing to you that his play was produced to-night."

She was again forgetting the company and he felt it was incumbent upon him to speak lightly.

"I feel myself rather a hero—quite fancy myself an important man."

"Did you know what a genius he was when you helped him?"

"No; neither did I suspect that his daughter was a genius, and I think after

a play has had the success this has had, you had better leave the stage."

"Leave the stage? What do you mean?"

"Yes, leave the stage. Finish your week and cover yourself with glory, and I advise you to make a little speech to-night announcing your intentions."

"What intentions, pray?"

"Of marrying me."

"But you know absolutely nothing about me."

"Nothing about you! With Lady Frost in England! I know you well enough to be proud and honored to have you for a wife; and if you do not love me now, perhaps in time you would learn to. Ginnie, you must, in the presence of all these people to-night, promise to be my wife. It is our destiny, I am sure. I have never before longed to have my home sanctified by a wife and children, and you, a poor little waif, longing for all a woman's natural cares and duties, through the force of circumstances were obliged to put your feelings into portraying those of

others. You loved Neil as a child, and it did you good, and has done him good. But Neil would never have made you happy. Whatever you may miss in sentiment towards me will perhaps be made up for by your confidence in my sincerity and steadfastness of purpose. I will not be known as the husband of a clever actress, so you must give up your career and put all that warmth and tenderness that now stirs your audience across the footlights into my life. Ginnie, I am not good at flowery speeches, but I know you care for me, deep down in your turbulent little heart, and you feel the peace and rest of a companion who you know will be true to you in sickness and health, in joy and sorrow, and who, like you, has as the guiding principle of his life a desire to make his fellow-creatures happy."

Hamilton Fitzmaurice rose and rapped on the table.

"Allow me to propose the health and happiness of Signorina Ginna, alias Al-lerti." All touched glasses, which clinked and glittered around the table.

“Allow me,” said Neil rising, “to drink to the health and happiness of our kind host.” Again the glasses clinked cheerily.

The band in the meantime was recuperating with champagne and not wasting any time clinking glasses. Madame R. now rose in great spirits.

“And allow me, good people, while all of us are still sober, to drink to the health of our dear American friends here to-night, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Bernard, to their hospitable country and to their golden hearts that beat in the right place.”

“Aye, aye,” responded Neil, raising his glass high above the others.

“Here’s to my own golden heart,” replied Mr. Bernard, smacking his lips, “and here’s to the best half of it,” with an affectionate glance across the table at his wife, “and just for the sake of good luck let us drink to the health of the whole gathering; that some of us may know each other better, but none too well; that all of us may sometimes meet again but not too often, and finally we all beg

the little lady who has made us laugh so heartily to-night, to say a few words of farewell before the party breaks up. In other words I call for a speech from Signorina Ginna."

He sat down amid much applause and cries of "Hear! Hear!"

"Do. Do," clamored everyone. The Duke fixed his eyes on Ginnie. Neil, pale and quiet, watched her nervously. Did she love this man, at thirty-five, as she had loved him nearly eighteen years ago? Ah, said he to himself, a woman with such a nature only loves once. Once the gift was mine and I lost it. He has plucked the jewels from the ball. He leaned back in his chair and watched her with half-closed eyes.

"Speak to them, Ginnie," whispered Grantley. "My fate must be sealed. Tell them that this is your last week in public. I shall never ask you again to marry me or disturb the peace of our friendship, if you prefer your own career to mine."

She clasped the little portrait of her

mother in her trembling hands. Before her eyes there arose a vision—a vision of the dead so far apart; the one in her lonely grave under the shadow of the mountain, in her beloved Italy, almost forgotten; and the other proud and triumphant, immortalized by her toil and suffering. She brushed the tears hurriedly from her eyes, and rising, glanced about her with her most bewitching smile and began:

“Ladies and gentlemen—”

THE END.



